

GRAND JURY A grand selection process

Lengthy procedure picks panel of 19 from list of 20,000

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — So you want to be a grand jury member?

Here's how the current panel of 19 was chosen, according to Jury Commissioner Deannie Lindgren.

The process began in November with the selection of those eligible for Superior and Municipal Court jury duty — from the lists of registered voters and those who have been issued driver's licenses or identification cards from the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

This year, she said, some 20,000 questionnaires were sent out, checking to see if potential jurors meet the basic qualifications:

- At least 18 years old.
- Resident of the county at least 30 days.
- Proficient in English.
- In possession of all natural faculties and of at least ordinary intelligence.
- Never been convicted of a felony, malfeasance in office or

other high crime.

Lindgren said of the 20,000 out, about 50 percent were returned.

"Any of those that come back with excuse requests are looked at carefully," she said. "They are not automatically excused, the only exceptions are if the person is responsible for some type of dependent care, if they have medical problems or have relocated."

The list is winnowed down to about 8,000 to 10,000 names.

Just because someone doesn't return the original questionnaire does not mean they are automatically excused from jury duty.

"Those that don't return it are called 'non-respondents' and will eventually receive a jury summons," Lindgren said.

Of those who returned the questionnaires and qualify, a computer randomly selects 1,400 names as potential grand jurors and a second round of questionnaires is sent out.

Some of the same basic questions are asked, along with additional ones about whether the potential grand juror is willing to

make the volunteer time commitment of 10 to 15 hours a week.

Some 250 people returned the questionnaire, and those are issued invitations to three separate orientation sessions about the grand jury.

Between 55 and 60 people attend each session, she said.

"They last about an hour, an hour and a half, and include one, two or three grand jury members who are currently serving," she said. "We go through the whole process — what they will be doing, the time commitment, the various committees, how they are selected, how they receive complaints, the different types of complaints...the basic functions."

Lindgren and judges personally interview about 125 to 150 people still interested, and from those, the grand jury field is narrowed to 30 people — six from each supervisorial district.

Finally, those 30 are invited to attend the final drawing. Depending upon the number of holdovers (this year there were three) the clerk draws the re-

mainder necessary to fill out the 19-member panel.

They are sworn in the last Friday in June.

Linda Gilcrest, the current forewoman and one of three holdovers from last year, said in her experience, the typical grand juries of the past, although they did vary some, had a "preponderance of retired people, or those not working any more on it."

"In my mind, we have a much better cross-section," she said. "The majority are working, very small number of the 19 are retired. Fifteen have full-time jobs. Four don't work full-time, only two are retired."

By a quirk of the selection process, there are 15 women and four men this year.

"I'm guessing the average age is about in the 40s," she said.

The oldest juror is in their 70s, she said, the youngest, a student, in their late teens or early 20s.

They receive the princely sum of \$10 a day, and 24 cents per mile, one way.