

# Animal Welfare Board 6-13-82 Raps Grand Jury Report

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The grand jury report alleging animal abuse and mismanagement at the animal shelter is "trash," a member of the board of directors said Saturday.

The report was released Friday morning after a year-long investigation of the shelter operation and the Santa Cruz Animal Welfare Association, a non-profit organization which contracts with the county for its services.

The report states the jury "substantiated complaints of substandard performance" in almost every area of operation, and terms the facility "a failure as a shelter, animal adoption agency, or licensing bureau."

Saturday the board pegged a disgruntled ex-member as the originator of those complaints.

Board member Tom Black, a Santa Cruz attorney, recommended the board retain counsel and sue the former member for libel and slander, saying the member was "an enemy of the organization."

In a special meeting with two grand jury members and acting County Administrator George Newell, board members admitted "mistakes" had been made, but denied allegations that the the board "has been largely composed of people who receive financial benefit from the program," that incompetent people administer euthanasia, that sick and injured animals are poorly cared for or that state laws have been broken in the treatment of animals at the shelter.

"We have not caused pain and suffering to animals," said shelter director Gail Willis.

The board answered additional charges of excessive adoption, impound and neutering fees, saying those fees are set by the county and by veterinarians.

The same allegations had

been brought against the board in the past by the ex-board member, said Black, and the report contains those charges almost word for word.

If the wording of the report is not that member's, "it is the most incredible coincidence in the history of copyright law," he challenged.

However, grand jury foreman Hulda McClean said the report would not have been published if the grand jury did not have facts to back it up.

She said Black was over-emphasizing one person's role. "Dozens of people" complained, not just a few disgruntled patrons or former directors, she explained.

"I urge you to check up on some of the things we recommended you do — they're badly needed," she said. "It is my hope you will find out about what's being done, and do something about them."

Newell indicated his office would investigate the report, and pass the findings on to the board of supervisors.

The grand jury has recommended the county not renew its contract, which this year was worth \$267,000 to the Animal Welfare Association.

"My feeling is to get out, and let the grand jury put its money where its mouth is," said Black. "But that would be doing a disservice to the community. The county couldn't do it."