

Watsonville Chamber picks new manager

By JAMIE MARKS

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WATSONVILLE — Charlene Shaffer, a long-time activist in Santa Cruz community affairs, was named the new manager of the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture Friday.

Shaffer was the top pick among more than 60 applicants for the manager's seat, which was vacated when Murray Crawford retired for health reason. She will become the chamber's first woman manager.

Shaffer is clearly elated about her new job.

"I think there's a new energy in Watsonville," she said Friday. "The (frozen-food) strike is behind them and the city is moving forward. ... I view it almost as a renaissance."

Events like the weekly Farmer's Market at the City Plaza and the Burrito Bash last weekend at the County Fairgrounds are steps toward invigorating the spirit of the community, she said.

Interim chamber manager Larry Donatoni said the board looked for strong leadership and management skills, as well as past chamber experience, in making its selection. The top seven candidates represented a wide variety of backgrounds, from all over the country, including Rhode Island and Colorado.

"I'll be president of the chamber next year, and I can say she'll provide the type of leadership the chamber has been looking for," said Donatoni. The board made its decision Friday.

Shaffer, 45, is assistant executive director of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, a position she will vacate to take the post in Watsonville by August 1. Her salary will be \$30,000 a year.

She's a member of Assemblyman Sam Farr's Monterey Bay Task Force, the Pogonip Land Advisory Committee, UCSC Affiliates, the Leadership Santa Cruz program, and a member of the boards of the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center and Women's Crisis Support, of which she is president.

Shaffer praised the leadership of the Watsonville chamber for being involved in community activities and



Charlene Shaffer

Activist named chamber manager

issues. She noted recent surveys of area residents, done both by the city Planning Department and chamber, have set an agenda for the chamber to follow.

Downtown redevelopment, beautification, jobs, maintaining the quality of life, traffic and transportation issues viewed from a regional basis are all priorities, said Shaffer.

"Through the surveys, people have let the policy makers know what they felt were important. It's a pretty clear agenda for the chamber to work on," she said.

She also had high praise for the newly formed Hispanic Affairs Committee of the chamber, which she called "very exciting and positive. It's time to incorporate the Hispanic business community in the Chamber."

Shaffer is married to Manny Shaffer, director of governmental relations and land-use planning for Granite Rock Co. in Watsonville. The couple lives in Santa Cruz with their two children, and are considering moving to Watsonville.