

Santa Cruz County

11/23/99

New SC council, mayor sworn in

By ROBIN MUSITELLI
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Newly seated Councilwoman Celia Scott sang a song, while her colleague Mary Beth Campbell stuck to words.

Outgoing Councilman Neal Coonerty offered some sad political advice, and Santa Cruz's new mayor Katherine Beiers proudly noted the babies in the crowd that were her grandchildren.

Outgoing Councilman Louis Rittenhouse didn't even make it. He was in Alushta, Russia, Santa Cruz's sister city.

New vice-mayor Mike Rotkin, who usually has plenty to say, had the shortest speech: "In the words of the King, 'Thank you, thank you very much.'"

It was all part of the shifting chairs Tuesday night on the Santa Cruz City Council, watched by an overflow audience at the Council Chamber stuffed with political notables, including newly-elected Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt and outgoing Supervisor Gary Patton.

Amid bouquets of flowers and standing ovations, council members Scott and Campbell were seated and Councilman Scott Kennedy was sworn in for a second four-year term. Mayor Beiers was sworn in to preside over the first majority of women — five of the seven — and promised to make the council meetings more accessible to people.

Instead of the typical short speech, Scott, an environmental attorney and the top vote-getter, elected to sing "On the Brink of the World," a song she and



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

New Santa Cruz Mayor Katherine Beiers leaves meeting Tuesday.

her husband, Peter Scott, had written about the San Lorenzo River.

The results, when folks in the audience joined in, proved that Santa Cruz is indeed diverse and a community on many different keys. One man sang a completely different song. More than a few watched their feet and shifted uneasily. Daryl Darling, a minister, knelt, his arms outstretched.

Campbell, a high school teacher who became political in the fight over the Art Wall on the city's Westside, stuck to more traditional fare, thanking her supporters and family and calling for

the development of a common vision for Santa Cruz.

Outgoing Councilman Coonerty related his best political advice, taken from Henry David Thoreau: "When a dog runs at you, whistle for him.

"My own advice is to abandon any sense of dignity as you take your place here," said Coonerty. "As a public official at a time when politicians are as popular as a fart in an elevator, prepare to hear almost anything said about you."

The highlight of his term in office was the public party celebrating the re-

built downtown Santa Cruz in April 1993, Coonerty said.

The low came this year when Coonerty's Bookshop Santa Cruz was shut down from a bomb threat after the council passed the downtown conduct ordinances.

"At that point, we as well as other merchants had survived rocks thrown through our plate glass window in the middle of the night. We had survived people jamming up our restroom plumbing causing sewer floods. We had survived phone death threats. We had survived a rash of politically motivated shoplifting. We had survived a boycott and we had survived the lies passed out in leaflets and letters to the editor. But now we heard from police that we should take this bomb threat seriously," said Coonerty.

"I never expected that public service in a community like this would ever come to violent threats," he said. "I never expected, when I took my seat here, that I would someday feel that my home and family would be unsafe for political decisions made here."

Coonerty's advice for Santa Cruz: "Lighten up, folks."

Outgoing Mayor Kennedy, too, spoke of the strong rhetoric Santa Cruz politics inspires, forewarning new council members that every act of creation is accompanied by rumor, paranoia and negativity.

Although progressives are clearly at the political helm, Kennedy said they face the challenge of moving away from oppositional politics.

"Perfecting the art of 'No' is no longer our charge," he said.