

CAMPed out



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

District Attorney Art Danner and Sheriff Mark Tracy prepare to leave the Supervisors Chamber on Tuesday.

Drugs Marijuana war-chest debate renewed

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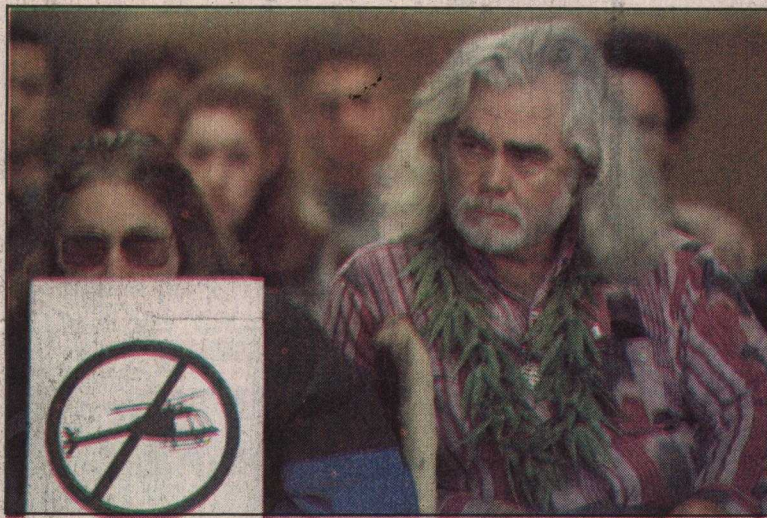
SANTA CRUZ — The annual debate over the county's war chest in the battle against marijuana is back on the table.

Tuesday, Sheriff Mark Tracy asked the Board of Supervisors for permission to secure a \$250,000 state anti-marijuana grant. The proposed amount is at least 10 times the money given the county in past years and could lead to the largest arsenal ever in law enforcement's local battle against marijuana.

Hemp advocates have called the proposed amount ludicrous. Two dozen of them attended the supervisors meeting Tuesday ready for a smoke-out, but got a breather instead.

At the request of Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, the board postponed for one week a vote on the grant.

In seeking their blessing, Tracy told supervisors that marijuana continued to be a problem countywide and pot use had grown among local teen-agers. In 1995, for the third consecutive



At left, two marijuana advocates demonstrate their opposition to the CAMP-funds request by Danner and Tracy.

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year, the county led the state in the number of marijuana arrests with 65 arrests. With the seizure of nearly 5,000 plants, the county ranked fourth in the number of plants confiscated, he said.

In the meantime, resources in the Sheriff's Office, which received \$11,000 in CAMP funds in 1995, were stretched thin, Tracy said.

"The current resources that are available to use will not allow the level of attention this problem needs and deserves," he stated in his grant proposal.

The \$250,000 grant would pay for two full-time deputies and a half-time prosecutor to work on the CAMP program year round instead of just part-time, Tracy said. That would allow the two

detectives who now spend part of their time on the marijuana team to devote all their time to child abuse, forgery, fraud and burglary cases, he said.

With a full-time marijuana team, investigations could be conducted more thoroughly and the deputies could spend more time on education efforts at schools and in the community, Tracy said.

Tracy had planned to tell supervisors Tuesday how Mendocino and Humboldt counties were slated to receive more than

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\$280,000 in CAMP funds this year and how nearly a dozen others, including Monterey County, were going to get over \$150,000 in funds.

But he never got the chance to share that data because Wormhoudt said she wanted to see a bust-by-bust breakdown — and not just average figures — of the marijuana eradication team's 1995 cases before making a decision.

Tracy was reluctant at first but eventually agreed to Wormhoudt's request. "We could come back one more time and rehash this, but I don't think (the additional information) will change anything," he told the board.

Those numbers are exactly what hemp advocates want to see

as well.

"The information will let us know who is being targeted," said Theodora Kerry of the Hemp Council, a local advocacy group.

Kerry and other activists have diligently protested the sheriff's marijuana-fighting efforts since the department joined the state's Campaign Against Marijuana Planting in 1985.

Hemp enthusiasts say CAMP is a waste of taxpayers' money. They also contend that in the past, CAMP has unfairly targeted small growers and people who are growing marijuana for medicinal purposes. In 1993 and 1994, they say, more than half those arrested during CAMP operations were growing less than 10 plants.

The information that Tracy has been asked to provide next week will show whether that pattern continued this year, Kerry said.

In addition, Kerry said, the

one-week reprieve will give the Hemp Council more time to rally supporters. In past meetings, more than 50 pot advocates filled the supervisors' chambers to protest CAMP funding.

According to Tracy, 76 percent of the marijuana cultivation cases in 1995 involved more than 10 plants — an amount that authorities say exceeds the purpose of personal use. An average of 51 plants were seized per case, he said.

The plants confiscated were worth about \$37.5 million in pot, Tracy said.

Tracy defended his proposal in a brief interview following the board meeting Tuesday. "This is just one piece of a countywide effort to combat the use of drugs," he said. "This isn't just a sheriff's deal. It's a community problem. We have to send out a message to the young people of what's wrong, what's right, and what's healthy."