

Supervisors accept anti-pot grant

BY LEE QUARNSTROM
Mercury News Staff Writer

After a heated public hearing that featured former District Attorney Peter Chang calling for an end to Santa Cruz County's "mindless, witless participation in the 'war on drugs,'" the board of supervisors Tuesday voted to accept a controversial state grant to fight marijuana cultivation.

But with two board members opposed to accepting the anti-pot money, and a four-

fifths vote needed to actually allocate the state grant funds, supervisors decided to hold the cash until they can work out a politically acceptable way to spend it.

The \$240,000 grant, sought by Sheriff Al Noren and District Attorney Art Danner, was to beef up the county's participation in the annual CAMP — Campaign Against Marijuana Planting — enforcement program. That yearly effort, which generally includes raids on rural marijuana patches discovered by agents flying state Air National Guard helicopters, has had mixed

results over the years.

Law enforcement officials claim CAMP has cut into profits of major growers in the county. Advocates of legalizing the drug say the annual program wastes taxpayers' money because of what they insist is the small number of convictions resulting from CAMP-related raids.

About 150 pro-marijuana advocates — ranging from men and women in business outfits to young people looking like a Grateful Dead fan club — jammed into supervisors' chambers to argue against ac-

ceptance of the state grant.

On hand to argue in favor of taking the state money was Sheriff Noren, who estimated that law enforcement has eradicated \$200 million worth of the illegal weed since 1985. He unintentionally drew applause from the crowd when he said that Santa Cruz County marijuana has been found "to have some of the highest potency in the United States."

Saying that he is only enforcing the law,
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the sheriff testified that he doesn't oppose the use of pot for medical purposes any more than he does opiates "when done legally and in a medically approved manner." However, since marijuana is illegal, he said, "I will continue . . . to enforce" the drug laws on the books.

Several times, a few unruly members of the audience interrupted Noren's talk with boos and chants of "Make it legal!" Other pro-marijuana advocates tried to hush their noisy comrades to avoid angering otherwise-sympathetic board members.

Although speaker after speaker testified of their need of pot for medicinal purposes, of other public uses where CAMP money could be better spent and of harassment by CAMP agents and their loud helicopters, the highlight of the hearing was Chang's emotional appeal to the board.

It was an odd meeting between Chang, district attorney in the early and mid-1970s and now a criminal defense lawyer, and Ray Belgard, now chairman of the board of supervisors. In the 1960s, said Chang, he had been an assistant Monterey County prosecutor working for Belgard. Later, when he was elected Santa Cruz County district attorney, he hired Belgard to be his right-hand

man.

"You taught me," he said to the chairman, "everything I know about law enforcement."

Then Chang recited what he termed "a litany of idiocy" — details of local marijuana cases he'd handled in which defendants had suffered physical and emotional abuse, had had homes ransacked and trashed and had even, in one case, been held over a cliff at gunpoint by a drug agent.

He decried "brutality and racism" on the parts of drug agents and pointed to the recent scandal in which officers of C-NET — the Santa Cruz County Narcotics Enforcement Team — were videotaped apparently kicking a handcuffed drug dealer who was lying on his belly.

"C-NET," Chang charged, "is virtually answerable to no one. It is time," he told supervisors, "for you to say, 'This is a war we don't want to fight.'"

When the hearing was over, Belgard joined two colleagues in voting to accept the CAMP grant.

A prior motion by Supervisor Gary Patton and seconded by Fred Keeley to not accept the money failed on a 3-2 vote, with Jan Beautz and Walt Symons joining Belgard.

Beautz then made the motion to accept the \$240,000 — but not spend it, since there was not a four-fifths majority to do so. It was agreed after that motion passed on a 3-2 vote.