

Forbus reviews years on board with mixed emotions

By KATHARINE BALL
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DAN FORBUS may have been a Santa Cruz county supervisor as long a time as anyone.

In the 18 years he has served on the board, he has seen major changes in county government, and, he says, a diminishing of individual rights as the county population has swelled.

"I haven't done any research on it, but I think I've held the office longer than anyone else," Forbus said yesterday, on one of his final days in office. "I'm proud I got elected four times."

Forbus, 71, was soundly defeated by Live Oak community activist Jan Beautz in the November election. It was his second defeat at the polls; he lost in 1976 to liberal Supervisor Phil Baldwin, but regained his seat after Baldwin was recalled in 1978.

Although Forbus can hardly bring himself to utter Beautz' name, he said he is not sorry to be retiring from public office.

Forbus first ran for supervisor from District 1 in 1968. A retired Navy commander, he had made his permanent home here for about four years when he decided to toss his hat into the political ring.

The issues that drove him into politics, ironically enough, were similar to those that brought Beautz into the race to defeat him this year.

"They (county officials) had just brought in the first General Plan (outlining where development would go in the county). That General Plan called for 2,000 to 3,000 people out Branciforte Drive, where I lived. I thought that was too many people out Branciforte Drive," Forbus said.

Beautz, who lives in Live Oak, ran this year on a platform that said the current General Plan calls for too many people to be crammed into Live Oak.

Forbus evaded commenting directly on the similarities between their cases, but said with some asperity, "We have reduced densities in Live Oak in three different General Plans.

"At one time, you could build a house on 1,000 square feet of property. Now the minimum throughout the county is 3,000 square feet. We have taken out densities that would have made Live Oak into one solid apartment house."

Forbus said in the 20 years since he first became a supervisor, "The complexity of county government has multiplied many times over."

"When I first was elected, the board agenda did not have an afternoon to it at all," he said. "One of the first things I wanted to do was write a letter to a constituent. There was no secretary."

Supervisors either had to type their own letters or wheedle the County Administrative Officer's secretary

into doing it for them.

Other departments were more streamlined as well.

"With Public Works, you called them up and told them where the chuckholes were, and they went out and fixed the chuckholes," Forbus said. "You could walk into Planning and get a permit while you were standing there. Now we are so complicated, it takes as much time to get through the process as to do what you want to do after you get a permit of some kind."

Forbus said much of the increased complexity is due to the swelling county population, which has nearly dou-

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"Government is for the majority. Whatever that majority is takes away from the individual, in order to have some sort of organized society," Forbus said.

"But I think the pendulum has swung too far. We have lost a lot of our individual rights that I think we should have. We are too complicated in rules and regulations."

County government has also changed because of new funding constraints since Proposition 13 was passed in 1978, said Forbus. Along with the increasing population came diminished local taxes and the increasing domination of the state in county affairs.

County assessment districts and building fees have become a way of life as the supervisors have sought the funding to maintain roads and build sidewalks.

Forbus said he is proud of his record of supporting social services. He helped get the funding to establish the county's senior centers, he said.

"And early on, I recognized the changing culture and the need for child care," he said. With Henry Mello, now a state senator, but then a supervisor, Forbus found the means to open the county's first day-care center.

Forbus' record on social services has earned him praise even from Supervisor Gary Patton, otherwise opposed to Forbus on many issues.

Forbus said the board, which went through a phase of acrimony and bitter infighting in the 70's, has mel-

lowed a good deal in the last eight years.

Not one to discuss the politics of the 1978 recall election in detail, Forbus summarizes that year and a couple following it as "trying times."

With Marilyn Liddicoat and Pat Liberty, he made up what was considered the "conservative" majority of the board.

Since 1980, however, with the election of Joe Cucchiara and Robley Levy, Forbus has found himself playing the role of loyal minority opposition.

"We've had the best working relationship since the recall," Forbus said.

Forbus said he has devel-



oped respect for longtime-rival Patton.

"Gary works hard for his constituency," Forbus said. "(Different) ideas between the two of us have always been pretty sharply defined. They have clashed ever since we've both been on the board. But in the last two or three years, we have learned to work more quietly."

Forbus said he is as concerned about the environment as Patton is, but it took Patton "a while to realize that what he called his concern for the environment, I called my concern for conservation."

Forbus said he has no plans to keep any fingers in county government. He will not appear before the board on any issues, most likely, he said, and he does not expect to be phoning supervisors with tips on how he would address whatever issues come before them.

"I am not going to make that kind of an effort. Something has to go real bad before I would do that," Forbus said, laughing.

He said he plans to spend time on a "large tractor" he has, and worries that the county will bug him about not having proper grading permits.

"I won't come down and appear in front of the board if they won't come out and look at my tractor," Forbus said.

"I figure county government was here before I got here, and it did a pretty good job, and it will be here after I leave, and will probably continue to do a pretty good job," he said.