

SANTA CRUZ

# Campers' advocate wants to avoid fight with city

✓ Homeless - 2000  
Attorney for homeless says he seeks peaceful resolution; police quash rumors, say no deadline has been set to evict the residents from area along banks of San Lorenzo River.

By David L. Beck  
Mercury News

An attorney working with the residents of Camp Paradise says he hopes to avoid a confrontation with Santa Cruz officials and police over the clean-and-sober but illegal homeless campground on the banks of the San Lorenzo River.

A police official said the rumor that Sunday has been set as the deadline for evicting the campers is wrong. "There's no truth to that," said Deputy Police Chief Jeff Locke.

City law declares illegal campsites a "public nuisance" and authorizes police to remove them

"forthwith."

"It could happen today; it could happen tomorrow; it could happen a week from now; it could happen a month from now," Locke said.

Attorney Paul Sanford, who is representing the campers, said, "No one has told me on the city's behalf that that is, in fact, the deadline."

The camp is home to a core group of 15 people who have spruced up what was once a needle-strewn area known as Heroin

Alley, putting in not only tents but crops, fences, decorations, a bridge, a bicycle-repair shop and a goldfish pond.

Most recently they added a portable toilet, which is being paid for by a donor who wants to remain anonymous, Sanford said. "There's no longer any cause for concern about waste seeping into the river."

Nevertheless, the campground

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## Camp talks continuing

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is illegal under the city's camping ban, and its location in a riverbank corridor also troubles people. At one time it appeared that a confrontation with police was inevitable.

Now, Sanford said, "I have had the opportunity to talk to representatives of the city, and we're having a constructive dialogue about this issue. My plan is more light and less heat. It's an awkward situation both for the campers and for the city."

Sanford, 44, is a program director for the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz as well as an attorney. He said that camp leader Larry Templeton mis-spoke when he used the word "litigation" when introducing Sanford at an open house last Saturday.

Rather than suing the city, he said, the plan is to find another camp site.

"We're looking at any and all options," he said, "including the Yellow Pages under Campgrounds. We haven't found anything yet. We're trying to send out a message to businesses, landowners, churches — anybody who's got a parcel" the campers can use.

They would clean it up, if necessary, and can pay rent, Sanford said.

Meanwhile, talks with the city continue. The law that bans camping in Santa Cruz also gives the city a smidgen of wiggle room, said City Attorney John Barisone.

The city, for example, may designate a public camping area. An attempt to do so in May 2000 was buried under an avalanche of outcries from those near the city's then-designated safe-sleeping zones.

Barisone said that to ask the city to find Camp Paradise another spot would be to put it in the "untenable position" of singling out one group for special treatment.

Nevertheless, Sanford said, "I don't think we're heading toward a confrontation. I think there are reasonable people all around. I don't think anyone wants to dishonor what they've accomplished" at Camp Paradise.

One of the confrontations Locke hopes to avoid is between police and homeless activists — distinct from the campground's residents, whom Sanford describes as "working poor."

That's why, if there is a deadline for moving the campers out, Locke refuses to divulge it.

"You'd put it in the paper, and there'd be another 150 people out there," he said. "We don't want to deal with a bunch of hanger-ons, a bunch of activists who are taking advantage of these people — and believe me, there are plenty of those in Santa Cruz."

Robert Norse, perhaps the best-known of those activists, passed out leaflets at Saturday's open house, urging non-violent resistance to any eviction. He doesn't speak for the campers, said Sanford.

"Robert is, I think, a well-intentioned person who's a vigorous advocate for the homeless in general. But in this matter, I'm representing the interests of the campers," Sanford said.

"There probably are people who think we should be more vigorous and more militant, but that's not my style. And I think it's counterproductive, particularly in this community, which is one big small town."

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