

*Chamber of Commerce*

# SCCCVC Signs

## All Roads Lead to the Boardwalk

by Anne Chavré

**T**hose decidedly strange banners up on the detour route between Highway 17 and the beach are causing a controversy, but it's not because of the things they say or the concern that motorists might pay more attention to reading them than avoiding other motorists, it's because of who designed and produced them.

Haven't seen them yet? There are 90 altogether, and they say things like: "Hey, you in the Firebird, stop that," and "This is why the dolphins remained in the oceans."

"The banners were designed to appeal to visitors," said Rita Quinn, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors'



Council, which commissioned them.

The intention, said Quinn, was to give tourists something amusing, light and friendly, reflecting the atmosphere of Santa Cruz County, to keep their minds off the traffic.

The value and humor of the signs is not in dispute.

The fact that they were created outside the county, however, has provoked the ire of local business people.

Michael Rosenberg, owner of The Advertising Agency on 41st Ave. said, "The SCCCVC intended to bring money into Santa Cruz County, but spent their advertising dollars outside the county. It's faulty logic."

And Karla Hutton of Hutton and Sherer, a Santa Cruz marketing, advertising and promotion company, said she "went through the roof" when she learned they had hired a Los Gatos company to produce the banners.

But Quinn said there's nothing inappropriate in the choice of Rauh, Good, Darlo and Barnes of Los Gatos to develop this campaign, or any other for the SCCCVC.

"This agency was chosen for their extensive experience in destination marketing," she said.

Because advertising companies all have their own weaknesses, strengths and areas of expertise, the SCCCVC began a search (after their inception in August of last year) to find the ideal agency for their needs.

Twenty agencies were contacted initially, according to Quinn, about half of which were in Santa Cruz County.

"We have some wonderful agencies in the Bay Area," said Quinn. But what the SCCCVC needed was someone whose specialty was tourism marketing.

Rauh, Good, Darlo and Barnes fit the bill. "This agency does destination marketing for San Jose and Monterey convention and visitors' bureaus and hotels," said Quinn.

The SCCCVC has a one-year, renewable contract with the agency to do all their advertising work, but Quinn said, they "use Santa Cruz County vendors whenever possible."

That's the other bone of contention: Why did they use a Los Gatos contractor, Adversigns, to make and install the banners?

Quinn said, "We had to move quickly, and the ad company didn't have time to do a public RFP [request for pro-



posal]; they chose Adversigns because they knew their work and they were good at what they did."

And it turns out that about ten people employed by Adversigns worked on the job—all of whom live in Santa Cruz County.

Haze Clark, an apprentice at Adversigns, said, "We got hassled on the job—'Hey, go home!'—but I've lived here all my life. I put my money in the bank here. I buy my groceries here. The money stays in Santa Cruz County."

But Tom McDannold, owner of Sign-A-Rama on Capitola Road, said in a letter to the editor (*Mid-County Post*, June 5) that the use of an advertising agency and sign company from outside the county "is symptomatic of the attitude that has made it difficult for the business community to either locate... or remain in [Santa Cruz]."

Some local business people question the value of a campaign that directs drivers from Highway 17 to the Boardwalk without informing them of other points of interest in the county.

The final banner on the route reads: "You made it! Vanna, tell them what they've won!" This congratulatory message is located in front of the Cocoanut Grove at the Boardwalk.

"It would be nice if there at least were signs saying: 'Pacific Garden Mall—this way; Boardwalk—that way,'" said Karene Murray, assistant manager of Cottontails, a children's clothing store downtown.

Nick Gravem, owner of Down Works on River Street, said the banners "made me reflect that not everyone has the same sense of humor as me."

He called the project an example of "fiscal irresponsibility and impulsiveness. But," he questioned, "Can it

hurt to have them up? Probably not."

The money for the banner project, \$50,000 in all, was provided by a grant from EEGAP, the federal Earthquake Emergency Grant Aid Fund, and was earmarked specifically for marketing purposes.

Quinn said about half the money was spent on creating the banners and signs and installing them, and half went to designing and printing brochures to attract tourists to the area. The brochures were printed locally by Aptos Press in Soquel.

"The SCCCVC is a private, non-profit corporation," said Quinn. "Some people think we're a government agency, but we're not."

She said their mission is to market Santa Cruz County as a visitor destination with an emphasis on attracting over-night visitors during off-season periods.

"We want to convey that tourism is a major industry in Santa Cruz County," Quinn said. "Our economic growth depends on it."

But, countered Howard Sherer, of Hutton and Sherer, "Why is this agency that professes to bring money to the county taking money out instead?" □

