

# Homeless shelter opens its doors

## Protester ends her fast

by HERON MARQUEZ ESTRADA

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Less than a week before Christmas, Jane Imler received the gift she most wanted when a 25-bed shelter for the homeless opened Wednesday night, prompting her to end a month-long hunger strike.

The Ben Lomond woman had begun the self-imposed fast the week before Thanksgiving to protest and call attention to the plight of the homeless during the cold winter months. She said there was a lack of facilities in the county for those who are forced to take shelter under bridges, in parks or in the woods. And, she said, there was a lack of concern on the part of officials.

The opening of the temporary shelter on Cedar Street was sufficient for Imler to break her fast and

she ate a few "symbolic" spoonfuls of homemade chicken soup while sitting before a group of photographers, television cameras, reporters, well-wishers, and early arrivals at the shelter.

The shelter at 320-C Cedar St. is the second overnight facility to open in the city this month and is the first phase of a program designed to shelter the homeless in the county during the winter months.

The Wednesday night opening caught many by surprise, since a Tuesday decision by the county Board of Supervisors not to use its Emeline Street facility as a shelter seemed to kill the project.

At the last minute, however, the county invoked its right of sovereignty from regulation and open the facility. Santa Cruz City Manager Dick

Please see Page A2



Bill Lovejoy

Jane Imler ends her fast with 'symbolic' taste of so

A-2—Santa Cruz Sentinel — Thursday, Dec. 19, 1985

## Shelter for homeless opens

Continued from Page A1

Wilson said today that under the California government code, an independent agency such as the county is not subject to the land-use and zoning restrictions of another independent agency, in this case the city of Santa Cruz.

Invoking this right, the county leased the facility and then subcontracted with the William James Association to operate the overnight shelter.

County Administrative Officer George Newell said Wednesday afternoon that he had acted on his own authority to lease the Cedar Street facility.

"I had all the power I needed to sign the lease," said the CAO, who said supervisors would be asked Jan. 7 to approve a fund transfer to pay for the lease and other expenses associated with the emergency shelter's operation.

Newell said supervisors were informed of the lease signing Tuesday evening. He said he acted as he did because the board "basically gave us direction to set something up as fast as we can and get people a warm and dry place to sleep."

The cost to the county for the six-week lease and the second phase of its shelter project is expected to be approximately \$10,000, said county Human Resources Agency Administrator Susan A. Mauriello, one of the prime movers behind the shelter.

The second phase of the project involves renting several homes during February and March to accommodate the homeless until the end of winter, Mauriello said.

Mauriello stressed that the shelters are only a temporary solution to the homeless problem while local governments establish a more permanent facility, if possible.

This did not seem to bother those who gathered at the Cedar Street shelter to inaugurate the facility. Throughout the evening, speakers at the opening ceremony and several of its new occupants credited Imler's controversial fast with speeding along the opening of the shelter.

"(Imler's fast) had a lot of influence on us," said Page Smith, a founder of the William James Association. "I think it introduced a degree of urgency even though people did not talk about it. It cer-



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Before hunger-striker Jane Imler, center, had her first supper, the scene at the Cedar Street shelter included Register-Pajaronian reporter Kathy Salamon, Page Smith, far right, and two unidentified men.

tainly (must) have been in the back of their minds."

"I think it was another element," said county Supervisor Joe Cucchiara at the opening of the shelter. He noted, however, that supervisors had already indicated their support for a homeless shelter before Imler began her fast Nov. 18.

Imler said she was relieved the fast was over, although she expressed disappointment that the facility was not a permanent one.

Imler came into the shelter Wednesday night saying she was a little weak, although strong enough to abandon a wheelchair she had been using in the later stages of her fast.

The symbolic breaking of the fast was delayed for about an hour due to a mixup about the time Imler was to arrive. She apologized to the gathered media for the delay.

When the ceremony got under way, Imler was presented with bou-

quets and two bottles of champagne were opened.

"It's fine," Imler said of the soup, adding that she wasn't "hungry yet." Imler said she considered her fast "a success" because the homeless had attained what she sought: "a roof and a place that's heated at night."

The hours following Imler's appearance were filled with songs, laughter, and guitar playing by the 25 residents who had registered to stay overnight. There also was a waiting list of at least 10 people seeking shelter.

Not everyone in the area was as heartened by the shelter's opening, however. Shelter landlords Bob and Doreen Lissner reported a half-dozen angry calls from commercial and residential neighbors complaining about the facility.

Paul Okuda, who is to close escrow on a property next door to the shelter, voiced his concern that the shelter may turn out to be more

permanent than temporary, which he said could lead him to re-evaluate his decision to purchase.

Steve Walton-Hadlock, owner of The Baglery restaurant next door to the shelter, said he was unsure of the impact the presence of the homeless would have on his business.

He anticipated, however, that most of his clients would remain and that only a few could possibly be offended by the shelter's presence.

Doreen Lissner, who fielded most of the angry calls, said the couple decided to rent the facility to the county because they wanted to provide shelter for the homeless during Christmas.

Lissner said she had faith that the people running the shelter would be careful to observe the rules prohibiting occupants from wandering in and out during the night because "this is an experiment" to see how well such a facility can be run.