

Homeless group plans to camp on vacant land

By GREG BEEBE
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — Protesters say they will risk citations and camp out tonight on a parcel of state-owned land in an effort to bring attention to the plight of the homeless.

But the leader of Take Back Our Town, a local conservative group, says if the campers show up, they, too, might be there to counter-demonstrate.

Carolyn Busenhart, founder of Take Back Our Town, said recently that her forces may protest the protest.

The site in question is a small lot at the corner of River and Josephine streets, owned by the state Department of Transportation.

More than 500 of Busenhart's followers — dubbed "red-shirts" for the clothing they wore — turned out in counter-protest to a "Homeless Independence Day" march July 4, 1990.

That event and counter-demonstration went without incident, although there were some tense moments between homeless activists and red-shirts.

Anders Corr, a member of the Santa Cruz Union of the Homeless that is staging tonight's occupation, said it is the union's intention to make its first "non-violent direct action" as peaceful as possible. Last week, participants were trained in non-violent protest techniques by the Resource Center for Nonviolence.

"We will definitely stay away from any sort of confrontation other than individuals speaking with individuals," said Corr. Still, he said, the homeless union will not

be intimidated by red-shirted demonstrators.

"I don't feel intimidated because I think we have wide community support," Corr said. "I think that their presence will sort of magnify our message. ... (But) it sort of saddens me that there is a segment of the community that feels the homeless are their adversaries."

"We hope (the red-shirts) don't show up," said Jeff Locke, Deputy Chief of Santa Cruz Police. He said the department would treat the camp-out as a routine trespassing case, if CalTrans files a complaint.

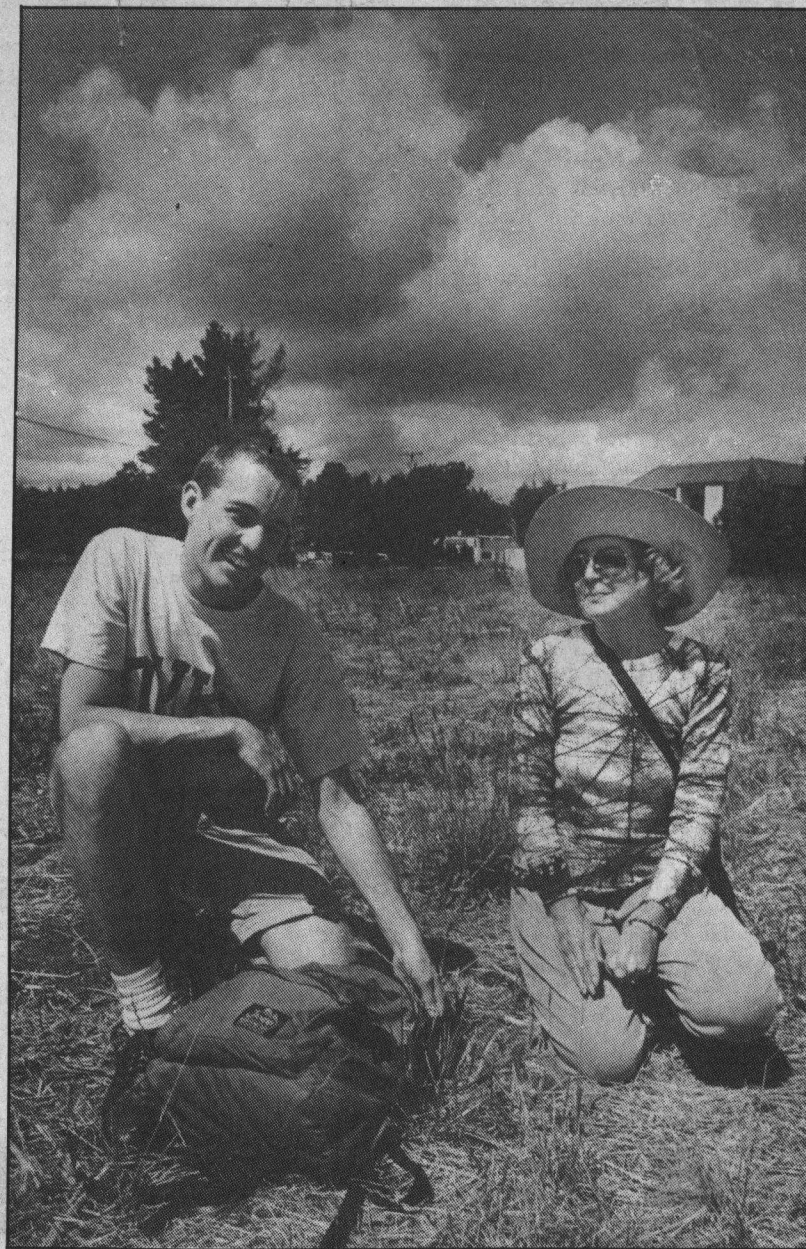
But the mingling of two groups with such "radical points of view," said Locke, could lead to "verbal arguments or some type of confrontation."

— As the union firmed up its protest plans two weeks ago, Busenhart decried the county's reputation as "a Club Med for the homeless" and said Take Back Our Town is preparing a lawsuit against the city and county of Santa Cruz for "allowing this to happen."

The union's action will begin at 4:45 p.m. with a rally and free meal on the steps of the courthouse at the County Governmental Center, followed by a march at 5:30 p.m. to the protest site. The "occupation" is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m.

Corr said the union's goal is to create better housing and health-care services for the homeless, as well as the repeal of the Santa Cruz camping ban, which prohibits sleeping outdoors between the hours of 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.

Corr said he wasn't sure how many protesters planned to camp at the site, but that at least two or



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Activists Anders Corr and Sandra Loring at protest site

three people are willing to get arrested.

A similar group in Oakland, Dignity Housing West, credits non-violent housing and property takeovers for leading to more than 200

homeless people finding permanent housing in the last four years.

Santa Cruz police recently rousted a separate group of homeless people and advocates who had occupied a city-owned building.