

# Santa Cruz County Grand Jury issues 2006 report

## Grand Jury Two Types of Grand Juries in SC County

As with many California counties, Santa Cruz County has two types of Grand Juries. The regular, or civil, Grand Jury is an investigative body that serves for one year. There are nineteen members on the jury. The civil Grand Jury is not involved with trials but rather serves as a watchdog over local government and other tax-supported entities.

The other Grand Jury is a criminal Grand Jury that deals with issuing indictments (charging a person with a criminal or public offense). This jury is called up on a case-by-case basis.

### Duties and Powers of the Civil Grand Jury

The Civil Grand Jury has three pri-

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mary functions:

- to randomly audit local governmental agencies and officials;
- to publish its investigative findings and recommendations toward improving those governmental operations in the interest of the community being served; and
- to investigate citizens' complaints

The Civil Grand Jury investigates local government agencies and officials to evaluate if they are acting properly. If a Grand Jury determines that they are not, it has various options. The most frequently used option is the presentation of a report outlining the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations in the matter. Such reports are public and sometimes attract media attention. Agencies or elected officials discussed in the report must respond specifically to the report's findings and recommendations.

### The Dollars and Sense Don't Add Up:

#### Bond Measures E and H in the Santa Cruz City Schools

Synopsis:

Bond Measures E and H, passed in 1998, provided funds for much-needed renovation and modernization of schools within the Santa Cruz City Schools District. Overall, the Grand Jury found school site personnel pleased with the work completed at their schools, and acknowledges the scope and complexity of the construction projects undertaken in the last eight years. Those projects, however, took longer and cost more than original estimates, and students are now occupying classrooms that have not been certified by the Division of the State Architect as being in compliance with all Code of Regulations, Title 24 provisions for structural, life/fire safety, and ADA projects.

The Grand Jury discovered that Measure E bonds were sold for more

than the voter-approved \$28 million, and questions remain about the 2005 bond refinancing. The Grand Jury is concerned that: bond money was spent on district administrative offices; lease revenues generated from sites that were renovated using bond funds went into the Santa Cruz City Schools general fund; bond funds and property tax deposits have earned and will continue to earn interest that could be used to reduce bond debt; and promises to keep the public well-informed about the bond projects have not been kept.

### Watsonville Municipal Airport: Headed for a Crash?

Synopsis:

Watsonville Municipal Airport is a valuable asset to the City of Watsonville and to the entire County of Santa Cruz. While land-use planning around most airports is monitored by regional commissions specializing in airport issues, a unique loophole in California State law permits the Watsonville City Council to serve in this capacity for the airport. The airport's existence is now threatened because the city is meeting its mandated housing goals by planning housing developments in airport safety zones, which could lead to increased noise complaints and untold liability in the event of an accident.

The airport is economically valuable to the city, providing steady employment, business opportunities, a substantial tax base, and drawing business and recreational visitors. Strategically, the airport is a key asset in low frequency but high impact disaster relief efforts, as was demonstrated following the Loma Prieta earthquake. Before any irrevocable decisions are made, the benefits of the airport to the entire region must be carefully evaluated through the formation of an independent Airport Land Use Commission. Such a commission will provide an opportunity for community input and to make impartial land use decisions more frequently to protect this critical regional resource.

### The Taser:

#### Don't Be Shocked

Synopsis:

Local law enforcement agencies use a variety of lethal and non-lethal



weapons. One of these weapons, the

Taser, receives both positive and negative publicity. The 2005-2006 Grand Jury looked at the use of the Taser by local law enforcement agencies, focusing on established policy and training.

The Grand Jury found that all local law enforcement agencies within the County of Santa Cruz had current policies that thoroughly addressed important factors regarding Taser use. The Grand Jury also found agencies were providing up-to-date training to their officers. The overall reported reduction in injuries to officers and suspects, since Taser usage was introduced, was an unanticipated finding.

Recommendations are made encouraging continued policy review and additional training.

### Domestic Violence in Santa Cruz County:

#### Have We Kept the Promise?

Synopsis:

The Grand Jury chose to investigate domestic violence as a result of reviewing three reports: the State Attorney General's Task Force on Domestic Violence released in July 2005, the 2003 and 2004 editions of the Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project - crime and domestic violence data sections, and the 2003 and 2004 Santa Cruz County Domestic Violence Commission Annual Reports to the Community. The Grand Jury wanted to determine if victims of domestic violence had an opportunity to be safe and if batterers involved in domestic violence were being held accountable. A broad approach was taken and the answers to these questions were only partially answered by this investigation due to limitations imposed on the Grand Jury investigative process. Recommendations are made to further

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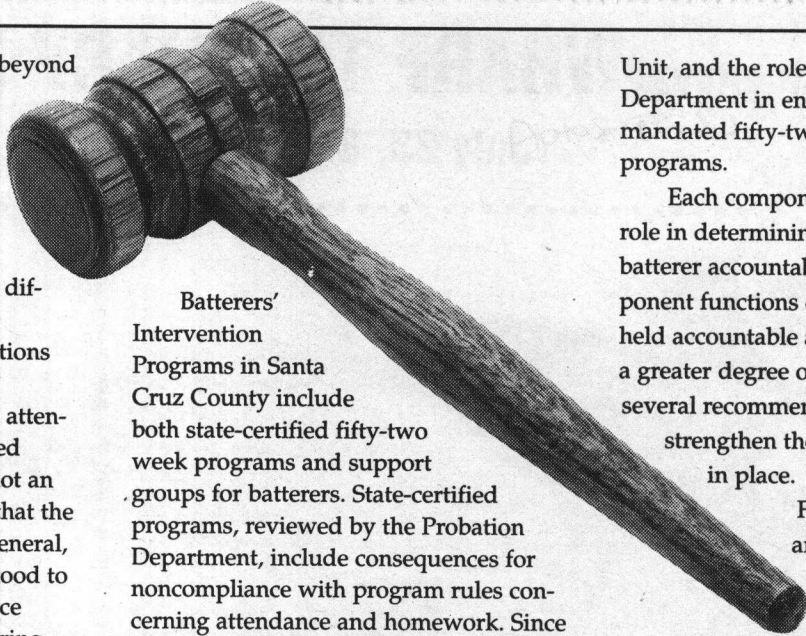
address and improve upon the services related to domestic violence in Santa Cruz County.

The Grand Jury initially looked at the two locally established advisory bodies, the Domestic Violence Commission (DVC) and the Commission for Prevention of Violence Against Women (CPVAW), to determine if they were effective as proactive, watchdog entities on behalf of victims. The CPVAW was found to be proactive and effective. The DVC was found to be minimally effective in several areas and woefully inadequate in many other areas. Subsequently, a large number of recommendations are being made to assist the DVC in regaining focus and organizational effectiveness.

Funding, while not the focus of this investigation, was addressed to assess the environment in which all domestic violence-related service providers must

function. Limited resources exist beyond the federal, state, and county funding streams that often vacillate with political and economic changes. Although the two primary, local, charitable organizations within the county are well respected and efficiently run, it is difficult for new organizations to be acknowledged or funded. Suggestions for consideration are included.

The Grand Jury then focused attention on organizations that provided direct services to victims. While not an easy path, the Grand Jury found that the opportunity to be safe exists. In general, direct services were found to be good to excellent. Domestic violence service providers would benefit from sharing information, experience, and referrals. Several recommendations are made regarding the need for collaboration as a cost-effective measure.



**Batterers' Intervention Programs in Santa Cruz County** include both state-certified fifty-two week programs and support groups for batterers. State-certified programs, reviewed by the Probation Department, include consequences for noncompliance with program rules concerning attendance and homework. Since the Grand Jury is specifically excluded from investigating the courts, research was limited to whether batterers' programs are holding batterers accountable. The Grand Jury found that programs are run well by qualified and dedicated staff. However, not every segment of society in Santa Cruz County is served. For example, there is no specific program for gay, lesbian, or transgender batterers. Only one program has groups for female perpetrators.

Finally, the Grand Jury looked at legal components related to domestic violence: law enforcement, legal assistance available to victims, the role of the District Attorney's Family Protection

Unit, and the role of the Probation Department in ensuring compliance with mandated fifty-two week intervention programs.

Each component plays an important role in determining victim safety and batterer accountability. When each component functions optimally, batterers are held accountable and victims experience a greater degree of safety. To this end, several recommendations are made to strengthen the infrastructure that is in place.

For More Information and to View all the Recommendations: Citizens may file complaints with the

Grand Jury to request that it investigate what they perceive as wrongdoing by a public agency, such as a school district or a police department. The Jury will decide if the complaint has merit and is not obligated to pursue the complaint. County complaint forms are available from the following address:

Santa Cruz County Grand Jury  
701 Ocean Street, Room 318-I  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
(831) 454-2099  
FAX (831) 454-3387  
grandjury@co.santa-cruz.ca.us  
www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/grandjury