

There's no question in sheriff's mind about need for new jail

By BILL AKERS

Santa Cruz County Sheriff Al Noren leaves no doubt about where he stands on the jail issue — he wants a new one built and he thinks a site near the rehabilitation center is the place to put it.

Nor is he reticent about expressing his displeasure with the board and the county counsel over what he considers footdragging on their parts on solving the jail issue. "I've had my problems with the board for one reason or another," he said.

Noren discussed the jail issue with members of OUT (Organized United Taxpayers) at the Aptos library Friday night, saying that some people think it's a "black and white issue. Believe me, it's not."

Starting when the jail was built in 1937 "for \$60,000, or something in that neighborhood," he recounted the jail's history. The 1965 grand jury criticized the county for the poor conditions that existed at the jail, Noren said, and the jail population kept increasing until 1970 when the rehabilitation center was built to house 160 inmates at a cost of \$750,000.

In 1972, a class action suit was filed against the county seeking the closure of the jail because of "inhumane confinement" of the prisoners.

In 1974, Noren recounted, a \$40,000 study on a jail and law enforcement complex was launched, with recommendations.

Among the recommendations coming out of the study were an increase in the pre-trial release program and for a "significantly larger detention facility." The study concluded that "the modification of the Front St. jail was not viable," Noren told his audience.

Noren said the study projected jail populations of 60 in 1975, 87 in 1980 and 115 in 1985. (Today, the county has a total of 191 persons in custody, some housed in out-of-county facilities.)

Once the study was accepted by the county, a group called the Jail Moratorium was organized to fight the construction of a new

Sermon topic

"Open for Living," will be the Christian Education Sunday sermon topic of the Rev. John K. Tritenbach this week during 10 a.m. services at St. Andrew United Presbyterian Church, 9850 Monroe Avenue Extension, Aptos.

Scripture will be Isaiah 35:4-7; and Mark, 7:31-37.

facility.

Then the courts stepped in and laid down some rules for the operation of the jail. It required that a law library be made available to the inmates. "We're in the process of providing the inmates with \$5,000 to \$8,000 worth of law books. Not because I want to do it, not because the supervisors want to do it, but because the courts say 'you will do it,'" Noren complained.

"They want more space for the inmates, more medical facilities, more recreation — the list goes on and on," he said.

And then in May, a federal court ordered that the jail population be cut to 40 males, six females and six trustees, for a total of 52 inmates. The court acted, Noren said, because the county, "not myself," was dragging its feet about doing something about the jail.

Turning to the pre-trial jail release program, Noren said there were three people interviewing prisoners to see which were eligible for OR — release without bail.

"I am somewhat at odds with some of the people they turn loose," the sheriff declared. "Their (the interviewers) sole purpose is to ensure that they (the prisoners) show up in court — not that they might commit crimes while out on the street."

Declaring that "I got upset with the board and county counsel" over their handling of the jail matter, Noren said he got his own lawyer and went to court and got the jail population maximum raised to 71. "This is saving the taxpayers \$5,000 a month," he said.

But, he added, the jail population limit goes back to 52 on Oct. 1, and he will be forced to bus more inmates to San Francisco to maintain the limit.

To remodel the Front Street jail, Noren said, would cost \$65,000 per cell. To build a new jail on either the governmental center property or across the street from it, as has been recommended, would cost \$63,460 and \$60,200 per cell respectively.

The federal court order required the segregation of felons from pre-trial inmates at the jail, so dormitories are being built on the second floor to accomplish this. Noren wasn't pleased about that development. To handle a two-story jail facility, Noren said "I hired 14 extra people at \$140,000 a year." Jailers have to be on the spot to guard the inmates, he said, "because we have sexual assaults, beatings, drug

smuggling, knives — you name it, we have it."

Also, recreation facilities on the roof had to be enlarged, and showers retiled. "It cost \$7,000 for six showers," Noren told the group.

All in all, Noren said, operating the Front Street jail is a problem. "People at work are unhappy with the security. We have kidnapers, murderers, rapists, and mentally ill there."

Noren added that he'd like to take out the pay telephone prisoners have access to in the jail, "but that would increase the tension. You've got to have some way to mellow the violence . . . but then they use the telephone to plot escapes."

Citing the deteriorating condition of the jail building, Noren said fixing it up wasn't his idea. "Federal and state laws govern it. I have nothing to do with it, and the board has nothing to do with it."

He encouraged members of OUT to visit the jail to see just how bad things are.

Perhaps acknowledging the group's conservative nature, Noren said, "You say 'lock them up and throw away the key,' but that's no the answer."

"On the other hand, we shouldn't provide them with comforts we can't afford as free people. The jail should be clean, humane and provide some kind of outlet so we don't have riots and burning. And," he added, "we should have some kind of facilities for people who are crazy in the noggin."

To illustrate his point that inmates are generally a rough lot, Noren told of the emergence of Nuestra Familia as a factor to contend with. "It's strictly a criminal force," he said, "they have no political aspirations."

He stated a recent hanging at the jail was a murder instigated by Nuestra Familia, "although I can't prove it."

As for rehabilitation of inmates, "the only way you can rehabilitate anyone, is that if they want to change their life style — they'll change."

Admissions and average daily population figures have gone up 21 per cent over last year, Noren said, yet he is faced with having to reduce the jail population.

"I wish I could tell you what the solution is. We do need a new detention facility. It does not need to be palatial, but it needs to be clean, humane and efficient."

As for putting it at the rehabilitation center, he said:

"We've got 14 acres there, and

it's not prime real estate. We could utilize one kitchen and have three cooks instead of six. we could better utilize the (jail) staff."

And, he added, it would require a sewer line to be built which in turn would encourage the development of surrounding property which would return more taxes to the county.

As for the cost of transporting prisoners to and from courts from that location, he said, "Unless they do a lengthy and expensive study, they can't say it would cost too much for transportation."

The county, at one time, had top priority in the state for \$2 million in jail funds, "but because the county is reluctant to do anything, we're now second in line for \$500,000."

He warned, "every day we delay is going to cost you more."

In answer to questions, Noren touched on several other matters:

— The effectiveness of the DAPC: "I can't say I'm a great advocate, or detractor, of DAPC."

— One effective way to fight


the drug problem is to take addicts off the street.

— Sentences being meted out by the courts are "not tough enough" and should be the same for everyone.

— A night court would be a good way to handle the increasing jail load, "but it would take more people."

— Restrictions put on jailers makes the job tougher. "We used to have 'tank judges' who would keep the peace. You'd tell an inmate he'd get five days good time if he kept the peace in the tank. You never had any trouble."

"That's illegal now. You can't everyone (the inmates) so much do it anymore. We've enlightened that now they kill themselves."



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