

'High-risk' sex offender named

Crime & Criminals
Authorities invoke 'Megan's Law'

By MAY WONG
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A public announcement Wednesday identifying the county's first and only "high-risk sex offender" under the so-called Megan's Law sparked outrage at the trailer park where the man lives and unleashed a horde of media there.

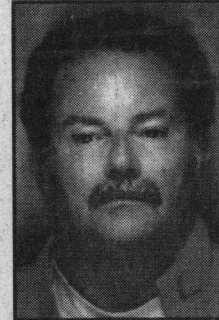
Local law enforcement chiefs held a joint news conference to make their first public notification of the identity and presence of

a "high-risk sex offender" under the new law that allows authorities to tell community members that a child molester lives among them.

The announcement was possibly the first in Northern California since the law was signed by Gov. Pete Wilson on Sept. 26, said District Attorney Art Danner.

The law is California's version of federal legislation that requires states to inform

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Elliott

12-19-96
'Now I know I've ruined many lives'

By MAY WONG
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A 55-year-old Soquel man who was branded the county's most dangerous child molester Wednesday supports the very law which labeled him such and could make him homeless and forever jobless.

"The law is good," Vern Robert Elliott said, referring to Califor-

nia's new law that allows the police to inform the public of dangerous child molesters paroled into the community.

"I think it's a very good idea that neighbors should know that sex offenders live in their neighborhood," Elliott said.

But while Elliott supports the law that gave the public the right to learn about child molesters liv-

ing near them, he did not welcome Wednesday's news conference or the media frenzy that followed. He had been forewarned about the announcement and hung out at a doughnut shop for part of the day to avoid the media.

It seemed a bit unfair, he said. He feels his life is in danger now

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Molester

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because of the widespread publicity. "I fear retribution from people I've never heard about before."

He also is coping with the reality that he may never be able to get another job.

Elliott, who was fired from two jobs two months ago after his bosses found out about his past, fears that if every child molester gets the same attention, it may send them into depression.

"What makes you feel better than sex?" Elliott asked. "If they're jobless and friendless, it may drive them to offend in some way."

"The sex drive is the most powerful drive in the world," Elliott said. "There is no little blue pill for offenders. I hate to say it but as a

general rule, sex offenders can't change."

Elliott thinks, however, that he is an exception to that rule.

He credits a program at Atascadero State Hospital for helping him see his flaws and change his behavior. The program forced him to quit lying to himself and opened his eyes to the trail of damage from his acts.

"Now I know I've ruined many lives," he said.

He is no longer the same person, he said, as he was during his "predator" days, when he would look for dirty ears or unkempt clothes on a child — signs that they were being neglected at home.

Molesters, he said, look for children who are looking for love, then fool themselves into thinking that

they are loving the children and not doing anything wrong.

Elliott said his sexual attraction to children is gone.

"I don't mean I hide it. I don't mean I avoid it. I mean I'm not interested in it anymore," Elliott said.

A new person now, Elliott said he would like to share about his criminal past so others could better understand how a child molester operates and how to avoid them. He said he has discussed with his parole agent his wish of giving talks at schools or at police training sessions.

"There's nothing I could do to reverse what I did or the damage I did," he said. "But maybe now I could do something to stop others from creating another victim."