

SJM 3/27/92 B-1 CHILD ABUSE

Child molester paroled to Santa Cruz

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A convicted child molester and former Presbyterian minister who admitted to having sex with more than 30 adolescent boys has been paroled from Nebraska to live with his 90-year-old father three blocks from a Santa Cruz junior high school.

The release of Judson van Gorder, 62, has angered Santa Cruz police and alarmed an attorney who represented one of his victims.

That his father's house, in the 900 block of Walnut Avenue, is within walking distance of Mission Hill Junior High has heightened concern.

"I think he's an extreme danger," said attorney Roger Holthaus of Omaha. "My biggest concern is that he's going to molest somebody else."

Diagnosed by psychiatrists as a pedophile with a compulsive personality disorder, van Gorder is described by authorities as a highly intelligent and articulate man with a history of misleading parents while molesting their sons on fishing trips, in motels and in church offices.

Until his release by the Nebraska Parole Board last Monday, van Gorder had been serving five to 15 years at the Lincoln Correctional Center for the first-degree sexual assault of a 15-year-old Kearney, Neb., paper boy.

Police serving a search warrant at his house in 1987 found a briefcase containing handcuffs, whips and paddles.

During his trial, van Gorder admitted to having sex with more than 30 boys — most ages 12 to 16 — during his lifetime.

His release after only 44 months in custody has prompted controversy in Omaha, including criticism of the parole board by Gov. Ben Nelson.

Thursday, California parole officials defended their decision to approve van Gorder's transfer to Santa Cruz.

Rod Thomas, unit supervisor with the state parole office in Santa Cruz County, said van Gorder met all the criteria for interstate parole.

He has a place to stay, will not require welfare because of his minister's pension, and originally lived in Santa Cruz before moving away 40 years ago.

If van Gorder had not been allowed to move to Santa Cruz, said Thomas, he most likely would have been released in Nebraska and then returned here anyway.

"We'd much rather have him under supervision here than without supervision," said Thomas.

In addition, California participates in interstate parole agreements. If van Gorder met requirements but was turned away, said Thomas, Nebraska would shut its bor-

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ders the next time a California offender applied for parole there.

Van Gorder has been classified as a "high supervision" parolee, a designation reserved for the most serious 10 percent of the roughly 20 to 25 parolees who come to Santa Cruz every year.

Under conditions of his three-year probation, he must visit a parole officer weekly and undergo regular examination by a state psychologist.

In addition, he must abstain from alcohol, cannot travel more than 50 miles without notifying authorities and may not contact children younger than 18 without approval.

Violating any of those rules would send him back to prison in Nebraska.

Authorities said van Gorder already has arrived in Santa Cruz.

A man who answered the phone at the home of Harold van Gorder said neither van Gorder nor his son was available for comment.

Van Gorder's attorney, Scott Sidwell of Kearney, defended the release.

Sidwell pointed to an evaluation last year by Lincoln psychiatrist Sanat Roy concluding that "significant change has taken place" during van Gorder's treatment and that his risk of molesting more children "is as minimal as anybody on the street."

The attorney said his client already has undergone four years of therapy and will continue with weekly sessions at Pacific Treatment Associates in Santa Cruz.

"Pedophilia is not curable, but you can modify the behavior," he said. "The community should be vigilant, but not hysterical."

Local police are hardly reassured.

"We're upset about it," said Santa Cruz Sgt. Joe Haebe. "Everybody's sticking their finger down their throat on this."

Holthaus, the attorney who represented the paper boy van Gorder molested, said his research turned up similar attacks from other states.