

by Robert Norse

With community support increasing in depth and intensity, Camp Paradise supporters filled the Santa Cruz City Council chambers on September 25 and won a month's reprieve for the clean-and-sober campground on the San Lorenzo River and its 60-plus homeless residents.

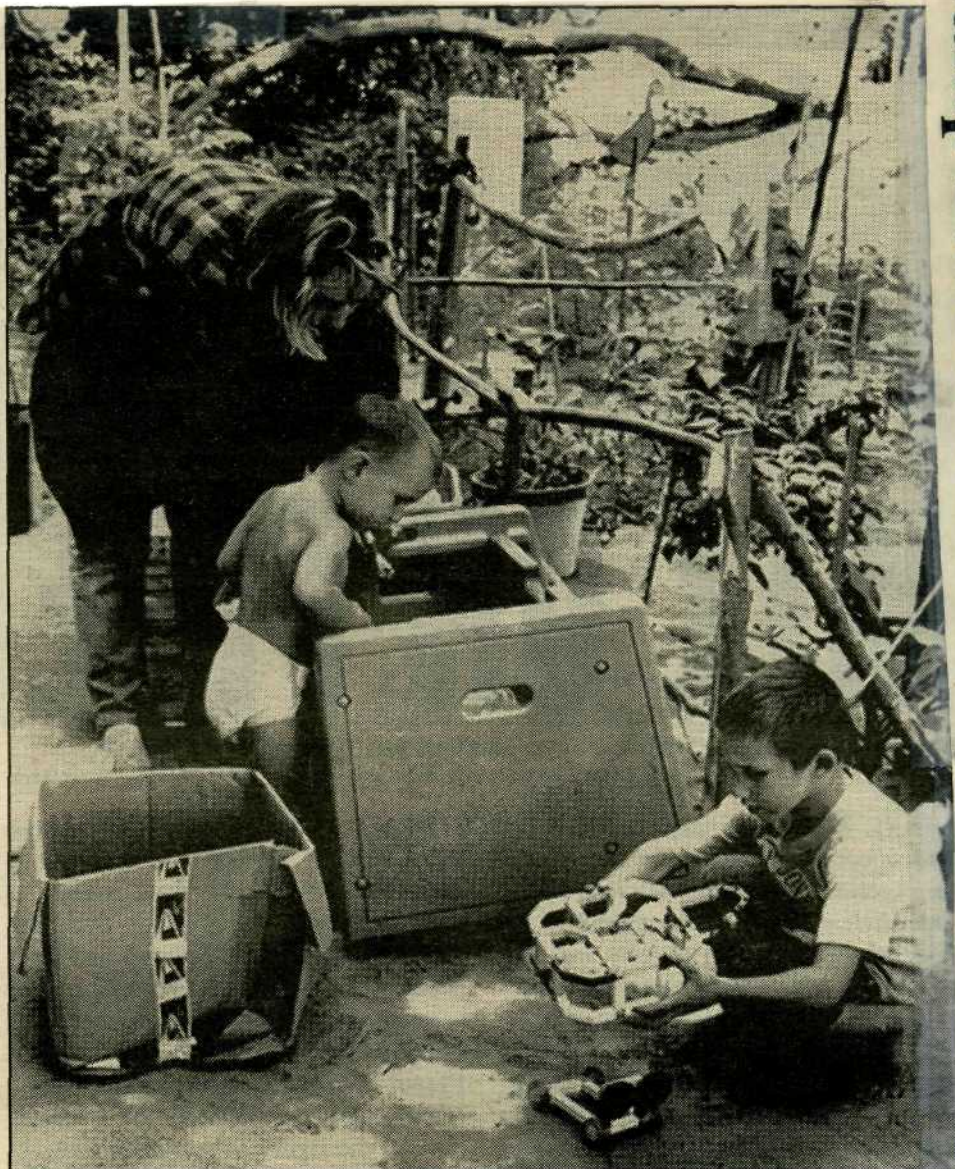
Facing a skeptical-to-hostile City Council, activist Tom Shaver of the Community Housing Land Trust of Santa Cruz County gave an update on an intensive week of meetings and plans to support the continued operation of Camp Paradise.

The week before, on September 18, maverick City Councilmember Mark Primack put a proposal on the council agenda — over Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice's opposition — to let the community present support for Camp Paradise and a plan for its continued survival, either at its current location on the San Lorenzo River, or elsewhere. In response to an hour of unremittingly positive testimony on behalf of the camp, the council agreed to give the larger community one week to make their case for the self-sustaining campground.

Camp Paradise has received no city money, and camp dwellers have generally sparked praise from their neighbors for cleaning up literally tons of trash and for making their area of the riverbank a drug-and-alcohol-free zone. The camp has even expanded to include middle-class folks down on their luck and unable to pay high Santa Cruz rents, women fleeing abusive situations, and travelers passing through.

On September 25, after a frenzied week of meetings between the Community Housing Land Trust, the campers, Friends of Camp Paradise and other groups, the City Council chambers were packed. Philanthropist and academic Paul Lee repeated his offer of \$25,000 to facilitate the project in matching funds. Local resident Emily Cutler passionately urged: "They are people. They have to be somewhere. They're willing to move to another location if one is found for them. If one is not found, where? Where can they be?"

Environmental concerns loomed larger earlier in the month, after hostile letters from some San Lorenzo Urban Restoration Project (SLURP) members diluted the 10-1 ratio of positive to negative letters reaching the council. Paul Johnson, chair of SLURP, clarified that he was not urging intensified enforcement against campers, and that



Donna and her sons Cody and Anthony live at Camp Paradise.

Lydia Gans photo

Camp Paradise was not even in the immediate jurisdiction of SLURP (the project is further upriver), and that it was campsites that posed a public health hazard that were the real concern.

Water-quality expert Dr. Khalil Abu-Saba gave a presentation to the City Council, complete with slides and flowcharts, suggesting that Camp Paradise's site on the river was a temporary one that could be okayed through the requisite agencies.

Primack introduced a resolution asking for another 90 days to work out a solid plan for the camp. Councilmember Kennedy, a supporter of the Sleeping Ban, nonetheless joined Primack, but suggested a check-in within 30 days when the issue would reappear on the council agenda (on October 23).

Councilmember Emily Reilly, who moved an anti-homeless resolution the week before [see front-page article by

Becky Johnson in this issue], worried that the City's Camping Ban wouldn't be enforced, but the council emphasized they were giving no direction on that issue at all.

Still, it was clear that more ticketing of homeless campers by police would not only provoke community outrage, but violate the unspoken consensus at City Hall that Camp Paradise had become too hot to handle.

Camp Paradise is clearly unwelcome to a City Council whose members have openly violated their commitments and credentials as progressives. Green Party Mayor Fitzmaurice has been in violation of the Green Party's "no anti-homeless laws" for three years by crushing reform of the Sleeping Ban. As a successful encampment self-run by homeless people, un beholden to social service agencies, and passionately backed by strong community support, Camp Paradise has generated sufficient