

# Isla Vista Disbands Tent City

by Robert Norse

In Isla Vista, a community north of Santa Barbara that is home to the University of California at Santa Barbara, attorney Glen Mowrer is defending members of the former TeePee Village (also known as Camp Home Sweet Home) from sleeping and camping tickets after a long and eventful struggle for the rights of homeless people.

The emergency tent city was set up by activists in January 2002 in response to several tragic deaths in the homeless community. The camp survived through August, enduring police sweeps and garnering student and community support. It finally fell under legal pressure from the sheriff and the Union of Park Workers on the Isla Vista Parks Commission.

With strong public sympathy for their well-run encampment, the campers got the district to pass one of the most liberal laws on the books that fined sleepers only \$20 and let them return after 12 hours; they narrowly missed legalizing sleeping completely. Then Mowrer got tickets under the new liberal law thrown out by showing that the Park District had been passing laws for the last few years without properly publishing them.

Complaints about the proximity of the camp to a nearby teen center sparked some controversy. A new law was rushed

through which went into effect on September 1, 2002. It mandates fines of up to \$1000 for violating the camping ordinance, requires a 24-hour stay-away following citations, and is a more serious misdemeanor crime. Park workers threatened to quit unless sleeping was included as a crime as well as camping.

Organizer Jenny Jett said union members complained they were being "stressed out" by homeless people and threatened to sue for disability benefits. "Yes, their job would be easier if no one was there," Jett said. "But what do they think this is? Their personal green empire?"

Activist Peter Marin said he felt the camp could have saved itself, or at least reconstituted the earlier, softer law by voluntarily dispersing. Jett said disabled camp members with wheelchairs and walkers needed to be near the public bathrooms in the park.

The new law states: "Unlawful to sleep between one-half hour after sunset and 6 a.m.... inside or outside of a vehicle on public property. Unlawful to camp in or on any public property. Refusal to leave or returning within 24 hours in violation of this ordinance — such a direction to leave is not a necessary warning."

Only Dorothy, a Chumash Indian, remains, says Nancy McCradie, "because it's her land."

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