

Camp Paradise Residents Vow to Resist Expulsion



Larry Templeton, founder and leader of Camp Paradise, helps two of the youngest camp residents, Cody and Anthony, get toys out of the camp's toy chest. Lydia Gans photo

Support has blossomed in the community. Camp Paradise mascot Max, a large black dog, has been visited by a volunteer veterinarian. Many supporters have brought food, water, and clothing donations to the camp. Letters to the City Council favor Camp Paradise by a ratio of nearly 10-1.



Donna and her sons, Cody and Anthony, find toys to play with at their home in Camp Paradise. Lydia Gans photo

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by Becky Johnson and Robert Norse

The residents of Camp Paradise, the self-made homeless campground on the east side of the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz, say they are not moving. "We have at least 20 people who are not leaving if ticketed or arrested," said Larry Templeton, Camp Paradise cofounder.

"There's just no place for us to go," added Danny "Cookie" Blair who has lived along the San Lorenzo River since October of 2000. Campers have cleaned up an estimated 24 tons of garbage from the riverbank since that time. The homeless residents of Camp Paradise have issued a statement saying they will pack up and move only as soon as there is another site for them to move to.

On the Fourth of July, Officer Eric Seiley, a city policeman assigned to the Homeless Services Center (HSC), visited Camp Paradise and threatened the campers, telling them ticketing would begin the next day with destruction of the camp scheduled for 48 hours later. Seiley had visited the camp in late June with similar threats, and returned in mid-July with written warnings telling campers to vacate.

Noticing the HSC number on the warning notice, Templeton handed Officer Seiley his cellular phone (another recent donation) and said, "You try them. They've been sending their overflow here."

As tension mounted around July 4, volunteer Camp Paradise attorney Paul Sanford (who had agreed to negotiate with authorities, but not to defend against citations or seek an injunction) advised campers to take tickets quietly, threatening to withdraw his assistance if any violent resistance took place.

Sanford said he was enraged to learn that an informal "hands off Camp Paradise" understanding with Santa Cruz City Council members was apparently off. Deputy Police Chief Jeff Locke and City Attorney John Barisone gave him the clear message that they could move on Paradise

at any time, and not wait for the camp dwellers to find another piece of property.

To deal with the apparent police double-cross, campers responded by calling activists, who began massive flyering downtown, alerted the media, and then prepared to join campers in nonviolently resisting any police eviction.

Campers began moving items they did not want seized by police, including much of the bicycle repair shop on the site and the camp's generator. But no police arrived to ticket and no camp destruction followed. Several of the campers left expecting a bust, especially those with outstanding warrants and families with children who do not want to deal with the punitive arm of Child Protective Services. Matching in numbers those who have left, are activists and supporters who have moved in to stand vigil, witness any police action; some are prepared to stay and be arrested if it comes to that.

Yet the waiting game continued. On the morning of July 5, campers woke up before dawn to discover two suspicious fires set on opposite sides of the freeway bridge several hundred yards from the camp. Their quick call to the Fire Department helped contain the blaze. An hour or two later, workers hired by Labor Ready arrived at 8 a.m. with instructions to clean up the east side of the river, "anything that is outside of a tent."

As the workers, some of whom are homeless, waited for their supervisor, "Ghost" and other Camp Paradise dwellers urged them not to confiscate the property of fellow homeless survival campers. A Channel 46 television crew arrived and began filming. When the Labor Ready supervisor arrived, he directed the crew to clean a different area of the riverbank from where Camp Paradise is located.

"It was the presence of the media that dissuaded them," commented one supporter. "The campers have been chastised by some members of the City Council for

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Larry Templeton, founder of Camp Paradise, builder, fixer, man of many talents and boundless energy, directs the construction of a pedal-driven dragster which the camp residents plan to race against the town's professionals.

Photos by
Lydia Gans



Donna prepares a snack for her children, Cody, Anthony and Rick, at the community cooking area. She and her husband and the three boys had trouble getting into shelters because there are "too many of them to accommodate."

"I intend to show that Camp Paradise is using environmentally sound methods to safeguard the environment, including re-vegetation and groundcover restoration."

— Dr. Khalil Abu-Saba, environmental consultant

getting the media involved. But this camp is still here precisely because of the media scrutiny."

The camp has been home for up to 60 people who literally have no place else to go. But with the impending bust, the number has dropped to 16. Children and their mothers were sent to "safe houses" to avoid complications with Child Protective Services, which have proved too eager in the past to sequester and remove children from "unworthy" homeless mothers.

A computer-savvy supporter set up an automatic-dialing, "bulldozer alert" calling list that would alert dozens of people in short order in the event of a police move on Camp Paradise.

The Green Party of Santa Cruz County voted to place an ad supporting Camp Paradise, with a message placed over a poignant photo of a small girl holding a sign saying, "Save Camp Paradise!" The Green Party platform opposes Sleeping Bans like the law under which campers are threatened with being cited and arrested.

In an interview with a local right-wing AM radio station (KSCO), Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice, a Green party member, reportedly said that the campground was "untenable" in the long run. The mayor was involved in a lengthy lawsuit overturned in late May that had banned three homeless activists from his office for five months [see *Street Spirit*, July 2001, "City's Suit Dismissed Against the Koffee Klatch 3"]. The Green-on-the outside, Republican-on-the-inside mayor still blocks any change to the City's mean-spirited Sleeping, Blanket, and Camping Ban laws, which criminalize 1000-2000 homeless people each night.

To keep their spirits up, campers have begun to hold Sunday church services at the camp. Rev. Jeff Lilley has been conducting services, as many of the campers are deeply religious. The public is invited every Sunday at noon.

THE TOILET SKIRMISHES

Vice-Mayor Christopher Krohn reported to Phil Gomez of Channel 8 television that the camp must be closed "due to the lack of sanitary facilities." Krohn was later soundly criticized for hypocrisy when he was observed by campers urinating under the Highway One bridge 500 yards from the camp. Krohn officially denied this, but still refuses to get City Manager Dick Wilson to follow the City Council's February, 1999, resolution

(which he initiated). This resolution required Krohn's Task Force on Bathrooms (more popularly known as the Krohn Krapper Kommission) to put in portapotties at industrial zones and other well-camped areas.

Campers, at their own expense, had rented a portapotty on June 23. But the company came out the next day and removed the unit, claiming they had been contacted by someone from the City and ordered to remove it. Yet, when Attorney Paul Sanford telephoned around, he could find no one from the City who admitted they ordered the unit be removed. Krohn denied the City was involved.

A local church agreed to pay for a portapotty, but without City permission was unable to place it on City property. Currently campers are using, with permission, the bathrooms at Denny's Restaurant, the Beacon gas station, and McDonald's, all of which are within walking distance of the camp. Campers can also be seen jumping on bicycles and rushing off at high speeds to visit the nearby bathrooms for "emergency pit stops."

Activists warned that the City was using the familiar "filthy feces" gambit, which officials successfully spread all over the front page of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* back in 1996. At that time, the seven-month City Hall Sleepers Protest, which demanded abolition of the Sleeping Ban, was smeared with reports of "homeless urine and feces," while then-Mayor Mike Rotkin refused to open the City Hall bathrooms at night.

A similar "sanitation problem" was used to close down the Coral Street Open Air Shelter in 1995 when the Homeless Community Resources Center next door refused to open up its restrooms to ease the pressure on two over-used portapotties serving several hundred campers in the last homeless campground in Santa Cruz.

SUPPORT BLOSSOMS IN SANTA CRUZ

Support has blossomed in the community. Camp Paradise mascot Max, a large black dog, has been visited by a volunteer veterinarian. Many supporters have brought food, water, and clothing dona-

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tions to the camp. Letters and e-mails to the Santa Cruz City Council favor Camp Paradise by a ratio of nearly 10-1, supporting the campers for forming an environment free of drugs and alcohol. Campers are seeking donations of cell-phone calling cards, a three-burner camp stove, garden supplies, and food.

On July 7, a reporter from the *Register Pajaronian* was investigating across the river from Camp Paradise when three men mugged him and stole his camera and equipment. He immediately sought help in Camp Paradise. Four campers searched the riverbank trying to find the suspects.

Camp founder Larry Templeton then went with the reporter to a nearby Denny's to meet with police to make a report of the assault. "Those are the kind of people who used to be where Camp Paradise is now," Templeton commented. "And if this camp is destroyed, they will move back in and take over and we will have the bad old days again."

CAMP HIRES ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT

On July 10, the campers hired Dr. Khalil Abu-Saba to prepare a plan to manage environmental concerns. Dr. Abu-Saba has a Ph.D. in chemistry and a master's degree in marine sciences. He is currently employed managing watersheds in San Mateo County, but is serving as a private consultant for Camp Paradise. He presented his plan to the City Council at their July 10th meeting, which included a plan to prevent solid waste from being discharged into the San Lorenzo River.

Campers have asked Dr. Abu-Saba to take river samples every 100 yards in the area above and below the camp. "We want to know where the pollution to the river is really coming from," said camp cofounder, Donald "Dirtclod" Algren.

"I intend to show that Camp Paradise is using environmentally sound methods to safeguard the environment, including re-vegetation and groundcover restoration," said Dr. Abu-Saba. "We will also be able to estimate the cost of the massive trash removal the campers have already performed in order to show how much

money the City has saved because of Camp Paradise."

PREPARING FOR POLICE SWEEPS

In an effort to prepare for the impending police bust, campers have prepared a phone tree should the police arrive. "We have the cell phone numbers of several major media including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, KPIX Television in San Francisco, *Metro Santa Cruz*, and Channel 8, with permission to call on a 24-hour basis should the police arrive to bust the camp," said Templeton. "In addition we are calling for all who support us to come down and witness the police destruction, or join in with us in an act of civil disobedience. They could come at any time."

Under Santa Cruz Municipal Code 6.36.010 section C, setting up a campsite with the intention of spending the night is a \$54 crime. This section is enforced 24 hours a day. While a ticket is an infraction, if campers refuse to move and are ticketed again within 24 hours, they could be arrested on a misdemeanor and taken to jail. "Where we will all plead not guilty, demand a public defender and a jury trial using the necessity defense," explained Templeton. "For many of these people, there is no place for them to go to."

NOTE: This story is the work of Becky Johnson and Robert Norse and they are solely responsible for its content. It is not an official statement by Camp Paradise or anyone else.

Support Camp Paradise

Supporters are asked to call Santa Cruz Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice at (831) 420-5020 and urge him to allow the camp to stay until another site is found. Supporters should ask that the City give permission to set up a portapotty in or near Camp Paradise on City land.

E-mail: citycouncil@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us or fax at (831) 420-5011. Please cc: atcamp-paradise@hotmail.com.

Directions to Camp Paradise: From Ocean St. in Santa Cruz, take Felker St. (near Denny's Restaurant) all the way to the end. Walk up the levee ramp onto the river levee. Take the first dirt path to the right and walk under the Highway One Bridge on the east side of the river. Continue on up the path about 500 yards to the footbridge over the goldfish pond. Welcome to Camp Paradise!

For more information, write:

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Message phone: (831) 458-6020 ext. 105.
To contact writer Becky Johnson, e-mail at wmnofstl@cruzio.com

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