

Public Program Successes

Exceptional Public Service

Summary

Every year the Santa Cruz County Grand Jury conducts many investigations, inquiries, and site visits in our role of holding hundreds of local government entities accountable. This year, the Grand Jury witnessed many public programs providing exceptional public service. This report commends the following programs and supporting agencies:

- **Bob Lee Community Partnership for Accountability, Connection and Treatment (PACT) Program**
District Attorney's Office, the City of Santa Cruz, City of Santa Cruz Police Department, the County Board of Supervisors, Sheriff's Office, County Health Services Agency, and Probation Department
- **Birthday Books by Coco**
Starlight Elementary School, Pajaro Valley Unified School District
- **Neighborhood Safety Team**
Santa Cruz City Manager's Office, City of Santa Cruz Police Department, City of Santa Cruz Planning Department, City of Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation, City of Santa Cruz Information Technology Department, and City of Santa Cruz Code Enforcement
- **Abandoned Vehicle Program**
City of Santa Cruz Police Department, Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works, and Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office
- **Inmate Welfare Program**
Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office
- **Voter Outreach**
Santa Cruz County Clerk's Office

Background

The Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury is charged with investigating local government agencies and special districts, and when warranted reporting on its investigations and making recommendations for change. In the course of our investigations the Grand Jury sometimes finds agencies whose actions or programs are exceptional and worthy of accolade. Typically these investigations are closed with no public announcements or acknowledgement. The Grand Jury found the programs listed above went well beyond community expectations and simple compliance with applicable policies and procedures.

Scope

The focus of the report is to recognize exceptional public agencies and programs in the county. The Grand Jury's goal in highlighting exemplary services is to educate the public and showcase the outstanding work being done by specific departments in the county.

Investigation

The Grand Jury collected the following information about these programs and agencies during our investigations. The reviews and information gathered represent a variety of successful programs in making our community a better place to live.

Bob Lee Community Partnership for Accountability, Connection, and Treatment (PACT) Program

PACT was established by the District Attorney's Office, the City of Santa Cruz, the City of Santa Cruz Police Department, the County Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff's Office, the County Health Services Agency, and the Santa Cruz County Probation Department to offer services such as treatment for substance abuse and mental health to people who routinely are arrested downtown for intoxication, illegal camping, or other problems.^[1] PACT was formerly known as the Downtown Accountability Program (DAP). Police and city staff collaborate with service providers, prosecutors, and the courts to keep chronic offenders and the most vulnerable homeless people out of the debilitating cycle of citations, arrests, and recidivism. Launched in the spring of 2014, PACT is a partnership of city, county, and nonprofit agencies that work to improve the quality of life for chronic offenders through court accountability and treatment.

The program focused on 70 repeat offenders during its first year and results show a 70% decrease in arrests and citation recidivism rates. During that period, ambulance runs for those 70 focused offenders decreased 80%.^[2]

With such an impressive success rate, PACT should consider expanding to other areas impacted by nuisance crimes such as Beach Street, San Lorenzo Park, the Emeline neighborhood, Grant Street Park, and the Harvey West area in the City of Santa Cruz and unincorporated areas in the county enforced by the Sheriff's Office.

Birthday Books by Coco, Starlight Elementary School, Watsonville

This literacy project strives to inspire not only a love of reading, but a love of books themselves. Following the tragic death of Colleen "Coco" Pavau Lazenby in a traffic accident in August 2015, her parents wanted to do something with all of the books she left behind. Working with the staff at Starlight Elementary and Pajaro Valley Unified School District the team came up with a program to give a new or lightly used book to every child on his or her birthday.^[3] For many of these children it is the first book they have owned. These gifted books become personal treasures and through their tales and adventures, books are no longer singularly associated with school work. The program endeavors to encourage a powerful shift in how the children regard books and hopefully inspires a lifetime love of reading and books.

There are 680 students at Starlight Elementary School and the project goal is to give every student a book. If the program is successful there is hope to extend it to other schools within Pajaro Valley Unified School District where Coco had ties as well.^[4]

Neighborhood Safety Team

The City of Santa Cruz has decided to address the ever-present and ongoing problem of public nuisance concerns in a new and hopefully more effective manner. In the past these nuisances would solely be the responsibility of the police department, which is not structured to tackle these chronic problems. The city's new Neighborhood Safety Team is comprised of staff from multiple departments and programs. This arrangement fosters teamwork with increased communication and cooperation, provides additional manpower and other resources, and brings a variety of expertise together. The team is also tasked with providing updates to the community on a regular basis.

One of the first locations the new Neighborhood Safety Team focused on was San Lorenzo Park, a place traditionally rife with public nuisance complaints, in particular regarding drug dealing, drug use, and prostitution. The Santa Cruz Neighborhood Safety Team made both environmental and technological changes to the park to alleviate these problems.^[5]

In order to complete its goals the Neighborhood Safety Team began by producing a prioritized list of all major public nuisance sites. It then planned a course of action for the various problems associated with each site. As each project plan is implemented it will be tracked to measure the team's successes or failures, providing valuable information for future projects.^[6]

Abandoned Vehicle Program

The presence of abandoned and dismantled vehicles across our county's private and public properties creates a condition of increased blight and deterioration which constitutes a public nuisance. The presence of these vehicles reduces property values, introduces fire hazards, creates habitat for rodents and pests, and draws children to play in these dangerous conditions. For these reasons, and to keep Santa Cruz County beautiful, both the City of Santa Cruz and County of Santa Cruz have established effective vehicle abatement programs.^[7]

For the purpose of these programs an abandoned vehicle is considered one that has not been moved in over 72 hours. Anyone interested in reporting an abandoned or dismantled vehicle can visit either the City of Santa Cruz Police Department website^[8] or the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's office website,^[9] depending on where the vehicle is located, and fill out the "Abandoned Vehicle Removal Request" forms. Another course of action for removal is to call either one of their abandoned vehicle hotlines at (831) 454-7602, or (831) 420-5863, as long as the vehicle location, make, model, color, and license plate number are known. A law enforcement or public works official will visit the vehicle to confirm it is abandoned and subsequently post a notice on it providing 72 hours to move it. If the vehicle is not moved on time it will be towed by the authorities and the cost levied on its owner.

During 2011-2015, the following abatement notices were issued and vehicles towed:

	<i>Abatement Notices Issued</i>	<i>Vehicles Towed</i>
County of Santa Cruz	608	322
City of Santa Cruz	10,556	529

Inmate Welfare Program

California Penal Code Section 4025 provides for the administration of an Inmate Welfare Fund. The Inmate Welfare Program is run by the Sheriff's Office. The primary revenue sources for this program come from inmate telephone fees and commissary purchases.

The goal of the Inmate Welfare Program is to offer options for inmates that want to change their thinking and behavior, and to ensure that inmates have an opportunity to restructure and redirect their lives. The program provides high-quality educational and vocational classes for the inmates where they can earn transferable high school and college credits. The program also offers substance abuse and domestic violence prevention counseling, religious services, and Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings.^[10]

Voter Outreach

The Santa Cruz Registrar of Voters and Election staff do an exemplary job of seeing that all eligible voters that have trouble voting are able to vote. Ensuring eligible voters are registered to vote and providing access to polls is as important to these professionals as preventing non-eligible persons from casting ballots. For voters unable to reach a polling station, they deliver ballots or provide rides. This is all done with limited financial resources, cramped spaces, and outdated election equipment.

Commendations

- C1.** The Grand Jury commends the District Attorney's Office, the City of Santa Cruz, the County Board of Supervisors, and the Sheriff's Office for the successful implementation of the Bob Lee Community Partnership for Accountability, Connection, and Treatment (PACT) Program that improves the quality of life for chronic offenders of nuisance crimes through court accountability and treatment.
- C2.** The Grand Jury commends Starlight Elementary School for the implementation of the Birthday Books by Coco program, which provides a book to every child at the school on his or her birthday. This program seeks to instill a love of books, encourage reading at home, spread the joy of reading, and raise literacy rates.
- C3.** The Grand Jury commends the Santa Cruz City Manager's Office, the City of Santa Cruz Police Department, the City of Santa Cruz Planning Department, the

City of Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department, the City of Santa Cruz Information Technology Department and the City of Santa Cruz Code Enforcement for implementing the Neighborhood Safety Team. This is an interdepartmental collaboration that addresses public nuisances, in particular drug dealing, drug use, and prostitution.

- C4.** The Grand Jury commends the City of Santa Cruz Police Department, Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works, and County of Santa Cruz Sheriff's Office for their Vehicle Abatement Programs. These programs enable the removal of the unsightly and hazardous public nuisance of abandoned vehicles. We are rewarded with an ever more beautiful Santa Cruz.
- C5.** The Grand Jury commends the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office for the Inmate Welfare Program, which provides much needed vocational, educational, and counseling services to the county inmates.
- C6.** The Grand Jury commends the Santa Cruz Registrar of Voters and Election staff for a job well done in voter registration and providing access to polling places.

Sources

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