

# East Palo Altans complain of inadequate police work

By PAUL VOAKES

Angry residents of East Palo Alto told San Mateo County law enforcement officials Saturday that they are not satisfied with the way crime is being handled in their community.

"We don't have the kind of relationship with the sheriff's department we need," according to Henry Anthony, East Palo Alto Municipal Council chairman.

Anthony told John McDonald, San Mateo County sheriff: "You have some people in your office that don't give a damn about East Palo Alto."

The criticisms were leveled during a panel discussion at the Community Conference on Criminal Justice, held at Ravenswood High School.

District Attorney Keith Sorenson, Judge Frank Piombo of the Superior Court, Juvenile Probation officer Loren Beckley and McDonald fielded questions and comments from more than 100 law enforcement personnel and East Palo Alto residents.

Anthony, billed as the moderator of the panel, told McDonald that East Palo Altans object to the recent centralization of the sheriff's department which has resulted in the closure of the East Palo Alto substation.

McDonald replied that since the reorganization, the crime rate has declined in East Palo Alto. He added that the deputy commander for East Palo Alto is selected by the municipal council.

But other residents, including Anthony, said the level of trust and communication between community and sheriff's officers has decreased.

"A black person's life is in safer hands in Menlo Park or Palo Alto than in East Palo Alto," Mel Harris, of 979 Beech St., said. "The officers who come into East Palo Alto are terrified of the black community, because they can't identify with the black community."

The panel discussion had begun with questions concerning the control of drug trafficking in East Palo Alto. Anthony said many of the 45 persons arrested in a drug raid in East Palo Alto in December are known to be now "back on the streets" peddling drugs.

Judge Piombo explained that accused persons are entitled to release on bail and that the first trials of persons arrested in the December raid would not begin until next week.

Sorenson suggested stiffer penalties for offenders. The chances are better than 9 in 10, he said, that a person convicted of selling drugs will not go to state prison. The person will probably be released on probation in a short time as well, he said.

Many residents, including Clinton Stanton, of 1152 Westminster Ave., said the sheriff's department could do more investigation for drugs in East Palo Alto.

McDonald said 11 persons comprise his narcotics squad, but that they have close contact with state and federal narcotics agents. To increase the narcotics force would mean a request to the county board of supervisors for more funds, he said. The approval of such a request would result in higher property taxes, he said.

Frank Milatzo of Palo Alto, who said he is a recovered heroin addict, said the sheriff's officers have been arresting the addicts rather than the

well-financed "pushers" who bring most of the drugs into East Palo Alto.

"Where, and how, will you start to get the main man?" asked Mrs. Celestine Adams, of 1387 Camellia Drive.

Midway through the discussion, Piombo remarked that it is easier to find the source of drugs by talking to young people in East Palo Alto than by talking to young people in his own community, west Redwood City. His comment prompted a throng of cat-calls.

Piombo later said he had used "merely a figure of speech" to indicate that there is no drug problem in his own neighborhood. "Ninety-nine percent of the people in East Palo Alto are good people," Piombo said.

Anthony said one of the purposes of Saturday's conference was to acquaint East Palo Altans with the criminal justice system in the county. Successful community development, he said, depends on the control of crime.

"But if the judges are going to rip us off, then we're wasting our time," he said. "We want to work out a way to work with the criminal justice system."

East Palo Alto has been plagued by poor press coverage, Anthony said. The local press reports only East Palo Alto events that concern crime, he said.

"We've been branded as a bad community," Mrs. Adams said, "but if we are a bad community, our very presence here says that we want to be a good community."

Other members of the panel included Rep. Paul N. McCloskey, R-Menlo Park, and Stanford law professor Thelton Henderson.