

Chief probation officer retiring

NATHAN ICHTERTZ - SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Article Launched: 06/27/2008 12:00:00 AM PDT

Judith A. Cox, Santa Cruz County's chief probation officer since 2002, is retiring July 5 after serving the community for 30 years.

The 59-year-old Cox, who started in the county as a probation officer in 1978, hands over her duties to Scott MacDonald, a 24-year employee with the Santa Cruz County Probation Department.



"I think I've reached the point to call it a career at 30 years," said Cox.

A graduate of Kent State University in Ohio with a degree in social work, Cox worked in both Colorado and Ohio before moving to Santa Cruz, and has 35 years of experience in all.

"I'm particularly proud of the work we've done in Santa Cruz," Cox said.

She was the project director of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative in Santa Cruz County, which works to improve public safety, reduce racial disparities and stimulate overall juvenile justice reforms. The Santa Cruz chapter is now a model site for the initiative, and often receives large grants from government agencies, partly because the chapter demonstrated a 56 percent reduction at Juvenile Hall in Felton since 1996.

In 2002, Cox wrote a widely acclaimed article addressing disproportionate minority representation in the juvenile justice system, and strived to change this.

Cox believes in developing local programs that emphasize strengths, family partnerships, interagency collaboration and community involvement.

The goal is to avoid recidivism by minimizing the number of both youth and adult offenders behind bars by only locking up people who threaten the community, and helping the rest seek rehabilitation outside concrete cells.

According to Cox, rehabilitation has changed somewhat.

"We still have drug-treatment programs, but counseling has changed from sitting in an office and talking about a person's problems to using behavior cognitive thinking," she said.

Behavior cognitive thinking is a process social workers use to connect with offenders to help offenders understand how their actions affect the community.

Cox's successor, MacDonald, has worked in the county's Probation Department since 1984, and has experience as an officer, supervisor and manager in both the juvenile and adult programs of the department. MacDonald said he learned a valuable skill from Cox: being an effective communicator, which he said is critical to the department's long-term success.

"I learned how to collaborate with the community from Judy," said the 49-year-old MacDonald. "She's an excellent communicator."

Contact Nathan Ichtertz at 429-2436 or at jcopeland@santacruzsentinel.com.