

Flesh Trade Magnate Randy Welty's Mansion of Ill Repute

On the Beat

By Barney Brantingham

Thursday, August 7, 2008

WAY OF ALL FLESH: Strip joint owner Randy Welty talked county supervisors into okaying his mega-monster Gaviota Coast home, but can he talk his way out of this triple-whammy?

Felony wife-beating charges—taking a baseball bat to his wife, Lynn Ballantyne, according to the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office.



On the Beat

The California Supreme Court's reversal of his \$1.4 million judgment against the City of San Bernardino for closing his topless club.

Vows by opponents to go to court over the Santa Barbara County supes' 3-2 approval of the nearly 16,000-square-foot hilltop home, barn, and other buildings. They claim the okay violates if not all laws of God and man, at least numerous county policies and the General Plan. On the losing end, Supervisor Salud Carbajal termed it "an audacious, monstrous development violating our policies" aimed at protecting the public interest and environmental resources.

Readers of *The Santa Barbara Independent's* Thursday, July 17, issue may have noticed a [color photo of Welty at the supervisors' hearing holding a sign: "Have Compassion."](#) But at a July 16 preliminary hearing, Santa Barbara Superior Court Judge Brian Hill ordered the Texas native to stand trial on two felonies—spousal abuse with injury and assault with a deadly weapon, to wit, a baseball bat—and the misdemeanor of spousal battery.

This act of non-compassion allegedly took place in the couple's present home in Dos Pueblos Canyon last March. Oddly to some, Welty's wife has accompanied her husband to virtually every court appearance in the criminal case, including the August 1 arraignment where he pleaded not guilty. A motion to dismiss charges is set for September 4. It is common in wife-abuse cases for couples to kiss and make up and ask that charges be dropped, and they normally are. But for some reason that officials decline to discuss, Welty's prosecution continues. No trial date has been set and Welty remains free on bail.

They say that outfielder Manny Ramirez lugs a lot of baggage to the L.A. Dodgers, but he's got nothing on our new neighbor, the guy some prominent Santa Barbarans praised to the supervisors as a wonderful human being and credit to Santa Barbara. Perhaps their glowing words helped persuade North County supervisors Brooks Firestone, Joni Gray, and Joe Centeno, while Mr. Strip Joint's background was the elephant in the hearing room.


Not that all that mess back in San Bernardino should have any bearing on whether he gets an eyesore on the hill, including a 600-foot-long dirt wall, 200 yards wide and 10 feet tall on average, aimed at reducing the public's view of the eyesore but actually adding to it, according to critics. Both the Architectural Board of Review and county planning staff turned thumbs-down on the

glass and metal monster home, but still the Planning Commission okayed it 3-2. I have no idea why Welty wants or needs such a humongous home out in the boonies. Why didn't he just buy the County Courthouse? It's right in the middle of town and the county could use the money. But there's no doubt that he can afford it, judging from the revenue from his various skin enterprises.

The bucolic village of San Berdoo is known as "Murder City," but what really got City Attorney Jim Penman's ire up 14 years ago was when Welty opened a club in which dancers displayed their (shocking!) breasts. Penman cited a zoning law and got a judge to close the joint. After four years, another judge declared the zoning law unconstitutional. Remember—the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that stripping is a legal form of self-expression.

When the Flesh Club reopened on Hospitality Lane in 1999, the dancers were no longer just topless. They were nude. Then came allegations that sex was for sale. In 2004, a jury awarded Welty \$1.4 million in lost revenue and expenses, meaning he was raking in quite a bundle from men taking pleasure in watching women dancing in bikinis without tops—and, according to testimony, having sex with the dancers. Officials reportedly even sent in a private eye, a former Riverside County Sheriff's deputy, clutching \$800, to get to the bottom of things. He reported that he indeed had sex with one of the female dainties inhabiting the Flesh Club. She pocketed the taxpayers' \$800 but no prostitution charges were ever filed, a fact Welty's lawyer pointed out to the jury.

Last fall, a judge closed down the Flesh Club for eight months on grounds of "lewdness" and allegations of prostitution. It remains shuttered, at least for now. Expect future chapters. This spring, the California Supreme Court reversed the \$1.4 million judgment against the city and sent the case back for additional proceedings. All told, Penman's crusade has cost taxpayers an estimated \$700,000, plus that looming \$1.4 mil judgment. All in the name of purity in Murder City.

Barney Brantingham can be reached at barney@independent.com or  805-965-5205 . He writes online columns throughout the week and a print column on Thursdays.