



Clay Peterson/The Californian

Criminal defense attorney Tom Worthington is hot on his latest case: Defending the

planned destruction of the Monterey County courthouse lawn.

Top criminal attorney takes up fight for courthouse lawn today

By Walter Neary

The Californian

The vote was nearly unanimous, the bids are in and you can almost hear the roar of bulldozers.

But don't bet against the courthouse lawn in Salinas.

Thomas Worthington is on the case.

One of the county's top criminal defense lawyers has a new cause: saving the lawn north of the courthouse square.

County supervisors are scheduled today to receive bids to tear out the lawn for a parking garage. But the lawn is the last large green space downtown, and street parking is available only a few blocks away, Worthington argues.

It's a routine matter — the deci-

Worthington resume

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sion to tear out the lawn was made in April — but Worthington is going to speak to the supervisors anyway. It's a matter of persuasiveness, lobbying city and county officials and offering alternatives, he says.

While he doesn't pass the lawn going from his south Salinas home to an office on Alisal Street, he says he likes to walk in or around the greenery when he can.

It's an unusual fight for a guy often found defending accused killers. But Worthington thrives on bucking the odds.

"It's a challenge to be on the underdog's side on a case that's getting a lot of attention. You have to fight your way out of a deep, deep pit, and everyone is against you," he said.

Worthington, the second of four kids raised in the Los Angeles area, remembers his parents' strong work ethic. He got his first job as a paperboy when he was 8, then worked in restaurants and grocery stores. His father, who worked for an insurance company, traveled more than an hour each day in rush-hour traffic to pick up
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Profile: He's a champion of the underdog

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his son, who worked across town.

"Looking back on it, I realize it cost him much more in time, gas, and wear and tear on the car than I was earning. But it was teaching me to be responsible and that was important to my father," Worthington said. "My parents expected us from the day we were born to go to college, and they knew they couldn't afford it. So all of us had to have savings."

The four children now include two lawyers, a chief information officer for a university and a professor of political science.

Back in school, Worthington wanted to be a teacher or trial lawyer. "I always liked to talk," he said, laughing. "I wanted to be able to talk and express my views. I wanted people to listen to me."

But that desire doesn't explain how the bearded Worthington ended up with the manners and pounce of a polite pit bull in a courtroom.

He went from Southern California to law school in San Francisco, a big change in the late '60s. But before Worthington developed what he now calls a "social consciousness," he earned money doing quick background checks on people who bought insurance policies.

Worthington learned how to ask strangers nosy questions about other people, a skill he said helped

Personal file

- **NAME:** Thomas S. Worthington
- **BIRTH:** May 25, 1944; Grosse Point, Mich.
- **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree in economics, University of California, Los Angeles; Law degree, Hastings College of the Law, San Francisco.
- **FAMILY:** Wife, Karen; three children
- **HOBBIES:** Skiing, swimming
- **OCCUPATION:** Attorney at Hovde, Worthington, Miller & Rudoni
- **QUOTE:** "The lawn is important because it is a source of inspiration and beauty. Every single day, hundreds of people ... get a little bit better feeling than they would get from looking at a parking lot. The lawn is worth millions of dollars of therapy."

him as a budding lawyer.

"You start asking them before they have time to think about who you are and why you're asking," Worthington said.

He began practicing criminal law in Monterey County in 1970 with a job in a private office. Worthington inherited two felonies — a home burglary and a rape.

Worthington lost both cases.

"I felt terrible. Especially when the Court of Appeal reversed the (burglary) because of insufficient evidence. There shouldn't have been a conviction in the first place," said Worthington.

He now believes fledgling lawyers should have internships. "No more should you let a new lawyer defend someone's freedom than you should let a new surgeon take out an appendix," he says.

After the losses, Worthington said he "re-dedicated (himself) to being good."

"I wasn't going to lose cases that should have been won. I'm confident in the succeeding years that I have never lost a case that should have been won," he said, stressing the last few words, then laughing. "I've lost cases."

Worthington has also taught economics at Hartnell College. The experience now helps when he explains complex legal matters to juries, Worthington said.

The lawyer found fame, and entry into a select network of California defense lawyers, while working with ace defender Charles Garry in the Inez Garcia case.

Worthington says he learned from watching Garry, as well as Monterey County's dean of defense lawyers, James Michael of Salinas.

A 1976 book on the first trial paid compliments to Worthington.

"He was hip without being a hippie, a bright, sharp young attorney who knew his way around," said San Francisco Examiner reporter Jim Wood in "The Rape of Inez Garcia."

Lawyer's highlights hit the spotlight

By Walter Neary

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Thomas Worthington's resume includes a string of Monterey County's most sensational cases:

■ The Inez Garcia trial of 1973. Garcia was accused of hunting down her rapist on the streets of Soledad and killing him. Her trial became a focus for the women's movement and attracted national attention.

"I won't deny it. I liked it. I reveled in it," said Worthington, who represented Garcia's co-defendant, the man who allegedly drove her after the shooting.

Garcia was convicted, but was freed after a second trial. Worthington's client, Fred Medrano, got a hung jury during the first trial. He ultimately pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of being an accomplice.

■ Terri Milligan, 15, who was ultimately convicted of taking part in a 1977 Seaside bloodbath with Harold Bicknell. Four women in one family, ages 6, 15, 28 and 66, were slashed to death.

■ Pinky Ngo. Worthington helped a Vietnamese couple win back their 8-year-old girl from a Georgia foster family in this 1983 custody case. Worthington says the fight cost him \$30,000 but was

one of his most rewarding.

■ Hart Silverie, accused in 1988 of a Carmel Valley murder committed 20 years ago. It was an amazing effort for a non-death penalty case. The defense contacted 300 witnesses and had an index of 1,000 names. The county tab was \$150,000. Worthington did it for \$45 an hour. His private rate is \$200 an hour.

Charges were dismissed after a hung jury came in 10-2 to acquit Silverie.

Good lawyering is "preparation first," Worthington says.

■ Audrey Garcia, a Salinas woman accused in 1988 of putting her baby in a trash bin.

■ Luis Zamudio, wrongly accused of a sensational Hollister murder.

Worthington can point to a three-year track record of winning the cases he wanted to win. Clients that were found guilty by juries or judges were later found guilty of less serious offenses — all Worthington said he wanted when the evidence clearly showed the defendant committed a crime.

Worthington says he won't say someone is completely innocent unless he believes it. "As soon as you start fudging the least bit, everyone can see it," he says.