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Posses — ready and growing

By Harold Streeter

Mention the word "posse" to a sheriff and he reacts like he's walking on eggs.

"What's the word on citizen posses being organized in your area?" sheriff's departments were asked in San Joaquin, Nevada, Butte and Shasta counties.

The quickly guarded replies ran like this:

"Never heard of one." "No comment." "You'd better go directly to those people."

One of "those people" is John Bevard, 47, who lives in Grass Valley and works as a telephone installer.

A month ago he started organizing Nevada County Posse Comitatus. Posse comitatus spells out as "power of the county."

Bevard's group now has 74 members. Fifty more friends are standing by. "It's things like the bombings that started all this," Bevard said.

"We want to be ready, not just hiding behind our doors waiting for somebody to come and break it down."

One of the group, which includes three former military men, went to talk with the Nevada County sheriff. Bevard said the sheriff neither encouraged

nor discouraged the movement. Bevard understands why sheriffs are sensitive about the subject. But:

"We are ready whenever the emergency arises that the sheriff would need us. We will not make a move without contacting the sheriff. We will seek his expressed consent in what we do."

In Butte County, two clothing store partners, Gary Anderson, 26, and Harry Basham, 48, started their posse comitatus and it is growing.

Anderson stresses this is not a vigilante outfit.

"We believe in law and order," he emphasized. "We started out with seven members and we all knew each other. Now we're going through the gun clubs in Butte County looking for other members who can meet our requirements and join."

Basham adds: "We're all Christians. We don't want Communists or any other kind of atheists involved."

One prospective member was rejected when he refused to say "so God help me" at the swearing in ceremony.

Guns? Yes, the posse members are licensed to carry them, Anderson said.

Observes Bevard in Nevada County: "You won't find a single automatic weapon in the bunch, just normal people with weapons like .30-.30s."



HARRY BASHAM HOLDS POSSE BADGE
Sheriff departments look the other way