Hart becomes 26th county sheriff

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APTOS — The ceremony officially making Jim Hart the Santa Cruz County Sheriff was packed with county and city politicians, law enforcement officials from districts throughout the county, superior court judges and lawyers of every ilk.

An auspicious gathering to be sure.

But the location carried a special significance for Hart, who spent the early part of his 25-year career with the sheriff’s office leading the substation at Cabrillo College.

“I love this campus,” Hart said during the ceremony. “I think it’s one of the hidden gems of the county.”

Hart has since managed every bureau within the SCSO, and received the endorsement of retired Sheriff Phil Wowak when he retired in March.

According to Hart’s wife Jackie Hart, it was the position as Cabrillo’s top law enforcement official that sparked his love for the administrative side of law enforcement.

Even before she met Hart when she was volunteer program coordinator at the Live Oak Service Center where Hart briefly worked, she said she heard from coworkers that he was not happy unless he was, “Mach 5 with his hair on fire,” a reference to his passion for hard work.

She described Hart as a dedicated father and family man who has rarely missed a milestone in his children’s lives despite a busy career.

Among other things, Hart said he plans to bring the Sheriff’s Office to full staffing, including in the jail system, where the realignment law has increased the population of inmates, parolees and probationers who must be managed. He also said he plans to focus on gang violence and hard drug sales, and has moved a detective to South County to focus on those issues.

Hart also said he plans to continue to be available, involved and engaged in the community, with county staff and with his own deputies.

“Every decision I make will be based on the safety of the community,” he said.