

Water leak may undermine SC merchants' holiday sales

City red tag closes Bead It, Camouflage

By DAVID PACINI
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Two Pacific Avenue retailers, Bead It and Camouflage, could remain closed through the holidays, the result of a Halloween night water-line break.

The water washed enough soil from under the building at 1329 Pacific Ave. that city officials have red-tagged the structure.

"The building is being inspected and tested by engineers, and we don't know when it will be available again," said Joan Levine, owner of Camouflage, a lingerie and erotica store.

"The city discovered such a big tunnel of love underground they slapped a red tag on our building," Levine said on the store's telephone answering machine. "We'll be open and ready as soon as we can slip into something more comfortable."

Levine is looking for a new space, and hopes to continue doing business through her Web site, experiencethefantasy.com.

"We don't have all the information," Levine said. "We're waiting eagerly to hear. Luckily it happened after Halloween."

If Levine is frustrated about being displaced during the busiest time of the year for retailers, she doesn't blame the building owner, Dave Wilson.

"He's a doll," she said. "He's doing his best."

Wilson and structural engineer Don Ifland of Ifland Engineers ventured under the building Friday morning to inspect the foundation. Metal plates covering a large hole in the sidewalk in front of the stores were moved and pedestrians were directed around the hole by yellow caution tape. A large backhoe parked at the curb.

"We found solid earth to work from and a cavern substantially smaller than we anticipated," said Wilson. The

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JOAN LEVINE,
CAMOUFLAGE OWNER

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pipe itself had been repaired.

Wilson said the fix could involve pumping concrete into the hole under the building but that a plan had yet to be devised.

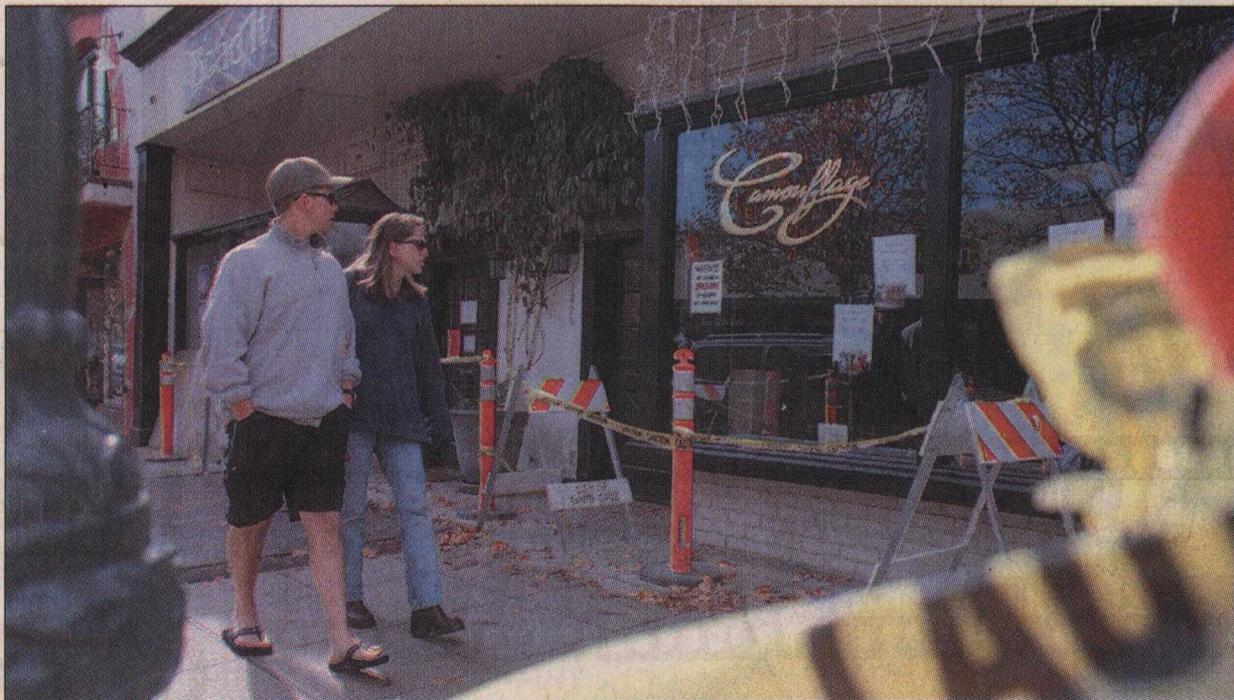
Ifland was unavailable to comment Friday afternoon. Bead It representatives also could not be reached.

Peter Eberle, Downtown Association executive director, said Friday he hopes the stores can find temporary space for the holidays, but isn't optimistic they will find space on Pacific Avenue.

"Maybe there's the ability to share other vacant spots on the mall," Eberle said.

The only vacant storefront is the old Robert's leather store at the north end of the street, but the Homeless Garden Project plans to sell crafts items out of the space over the holiday season, and has signed an agreement.

Contact David Pacini at
dpacini@santa-cruz.com.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Camouflage and Bead It have closed until the washout under the Pacific Avenue building can be repaired.