

Pacific Garden
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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Bob Zoccoli: 'like working inside a pinball machine.'

Save or raze, Zoccoli's looks for end to St. George debate

SANTA CRUZ — Trying to serve 300 lunches a day from a tiny, 10-by-30-foot trailer has given new meaning to the term "close-knit family."

When Bob Zoccoli and his family began making sandwiches and dishing up lasagna from the trailer right after the October earthquake, little did they think their Zoccoli's Delicatessen would still be on wheels almost a year later.

"We didn't expect to be here half this long. We've had some tense moments. These are really close quarters," said Zoccoli, who works in the trailer with his wife, Ann; sons, Russell and Craig; and daughter-in-law, Patty.

"Craig says it's like working inside a pinball machine," Bob Zoccoli said.

The Zoccolis are caught in the middle of struggle over the St. George Hotel. The building which housed their deli shares a common wall with the St. George and can't be reopened until the hotel is either torn down or shored up.

They are looking to Superior Court Judge Tom Black to decide which one it should be. Black will hold a hearing on the issue Friday.

"A decision needs to be made. We can't see this going on any longer. We need to get on with our lives," Zoccoli said.

Zoccoli's is serving some 300 people during the noon-time crunch. "We really can't move any more people than that through the trailer," he

said.

But while 300 people is a lot to serve from the trailer, which is parked in a vacant lot at the corner of Center and Cedar streets, it represents more than a one-third reduction in customers.

"Our income has been reduced by half. That's hard to adjust to," said Zoccoli, whose parents and aunt opened the deli — then known as Plaza Market — in 1948.

Zoccoli was still in high school then when he started working in the store. He and his wife, Ann, took it over in 1961.

"We're hanging on for a reason. We're just not willing to pick up and go to 41st Avenue," he said Wednesday.

But, he said, the family can't hold on much longer.

"I'm just afraid that Friday won't be the end of the subject," Zoccoli said.

If it's not, Zoccoli said, he will have to take a hard look at his family's future. "We'll have to be realistic and look for another location," he said. "I would like those who are fighting to save the St. George to realize that there are families, like ours, that are trying to make a living, and we're suffering. I'd like them to think both sides of the issue."

By Mark Bergstrom

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