

LOCAL

City Editor
Royal Calkins
429-2410

rcalkins@santa-cruz.com

Historical houses - South County Another try to save landmark

Group hopes county will bend rules for historic house in South County

By CAROLYN LEAL
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — The grand old house sits in a strawberry patch along Highway 1 in Watsonville, its exterior weathered and gray. It's been a long time since a paintbrush or any work crew has touched the 2½-story structure.

Yet there is something proud and dignified about the abandoned Victorian known as the Redman House, something that captures the attention of motorists speeding by on the highway.

Karell Reader grew up in Watsonville and it tugged at her every time she saw it.

"I had driven by that house all my life and watched as it slowly started to fade. It just kept pulling at my heart strings. It's a beautiful house and it deserves to be saved."

Reader is working with the Redman House Committee in another effort to save the 1897 Queen Anne Victorian.

"We want to renovate it and make it beautiful and useful again," she said.

The Watsonville residents are in the process of establishing a nonprofit foundation. They are kicking off the preservation effort with a champagne brunch April 11 at the Lagoon House at Pajaro Dunes.

The renovation effort will cost about

\$750,000, estimated John Skinner, a building contractor who revived the most recent effort to save the house. The house and 14 adjoining acres are owned by Richard Kelley and GreenFarm, a limited partnership, and leased to strawberry growers.

The owners have offered to donate the house and make some adjacent land available, Skinner said. But it's yet to be decided how the house would be used.

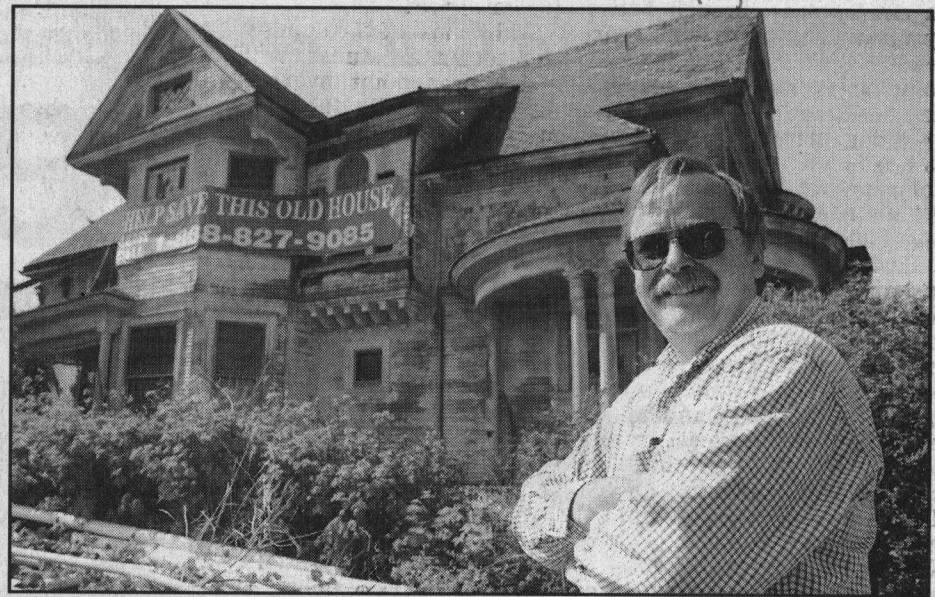
"That's one of the questions we have to answer," Skinner said. "It would have to be some way for the house to support itself. Maybe some tourist service."

An earlier effort to preserve the house as part of a multimillion-dollar commercial development called Riverside Farm foundered because the property is zoned for agricultural use.

The 14-acre parcel between West Beach Road and Riverside Drive is in Santa Cruz County, which opposes conversion of farm land to other uses.

This time around, a different tactic is being tried.

"We're not asking for a zoning change at this point," said Owen Lawlor, spokesman for GreenFarm. "We're asking for a special exception ... that would allow the public to see it. ... It could house offices or a restaurant and this way could be preserved. The only use cur-



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

John Skinner hopes the public will help save the Redman House.

rently permitted by the county is a single-family dwelling."

GreenFarm will appear in the next month or two before the county Board of Supervisors, Lawlor said.

The house was built in 1897 for James Redman, a prominent Pajaro Valley farmer who came West as a child with his parents. It was designed by the well-known architect William Weeks, who designed many houses in the county.

The Redman family died out and the house passed through multiple owners. It has been unoccupied since the 1989 earthquake.

"Everyone agrees it should be saved and restored," Reader said. "We're really open to anything that would allow the house to support itself. This is the time to come forward. We're at the point where, if we don't take some action, it will be too late."