

Life on 'Seabright Peninsula'

Lonely merchants say business hurting

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SANTA CRUZ — You can call it the Seabright Peninsula now.

The loss of bridges on the west and east has left the Seabright neighborhood isolated. The situation has left some people happy, others troubled.

Before the quake, residents contended with traffic cutting through neighborhood streets, and they like the new isolation just fine.

But business at the end of Seabright Avenue has nearly ground to a halt.

"It's like being on an island," said Cy Lucas, an owner of the Seabright Surf Shop, who under normal circumstances wouldn't mind being on an island. Lucas said business is about a tenth what it should be.

"It's just a drastic change," said Joyce Westin, next door at Seabright's Wine & Cheese. "Thank goodness we've had good weather. The neighborhood is keeping us alive."

Seabright Barber Shop owner Capers Beach said that first, there was too much traffic when the East Cliff Drive bridge over the Southern Pacific train trestle was closed. But "when Mother Nature closed the other one (over the harbor) there was no traffic," Beach said.

The Murray Street bridge across the Small Craft Harbor has been closed since the earthquake. The quake jostled the bridge, causing the vertical supports to separate from the roadbed, city Public Works Director Larry Erwin said.

"The foundation and columns took a real shock," Erwin said Wednesday when he and Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt met with about two dozen Seabright and harbor area merchants.

City traffic engineer Chris Schneider said an average of 24,000 cars crossed the bridge each day before the quake.

Those cars now must use Soquel Avenue or Highway 1, turning those roadways nearly into parking lots during commute times.

Residents in Live Oak neighborhoods east of the harbor now have 20- to 30-minute commutes from downtown Santa Cruz, compared with 10 minutes when both bridges were open.

Erwin said a fast-track repair plan for the Murray Street bridge is underway. Plans are complete and have been submitted to Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration for review. Erwin said both agencies promised to complete the review process by next Tuesday. He estimated the repairs would be

finished by late March. A contractor should be on the job by mid- to late January, Erwin said.

Some business owners said they think a contractor should be on the job now.

"If they'd started right away they could be pouring concrete now," said Bob Morrell, a fish wholesaler. Morrell said his business hasn't suffered but he feels for his colleagues whose livelihood depends on local business.

"If you don't have the local business, you're out of business," Morrell said.

Seabright business owners said much of their business depends on local customers who used the Murray Street Bridge. John Gribben at See-Brite Photo Lab has a customer at the harbor who mails her film for developing. Charley Meehan, co-owner of Seabright Brewery, said customers sneak across the bridge on bicycles on the weekend but don't come by during the week.

The merchants pressed Erwin to make sure work crews worked seven days a week. "It's our highest priority," Erwin assured them.

The East Cliff Drive bridge will be finished sometime in May, Erwin said.

New signs are planned to direct traffic to the harbor, engineer Schneider said.

Many of the business along lower Seabright Avenue have new owners. All are struggling. Lucas and three partners took over the surf shop Oct. 2. Carla Rittue took over Seabright's Wine & Cheese Dec. 4. She has big plans for remodeling but everything is on hold. "It's kind of scary," she said.

Linda Hopper took over Luther's restaurant and renamed it Linda's Seabright Cafe three weeks before the quake. She said her Sunday business is carrying her.

Hopper wrote to Wormhoudt — nicely, she said — and collected signatures from other business owners asking for answers about the bridge. She hosted Wednesday's meeting. Previously, everyone had heard and exchanged rumors. Even "official" answers were suspect.

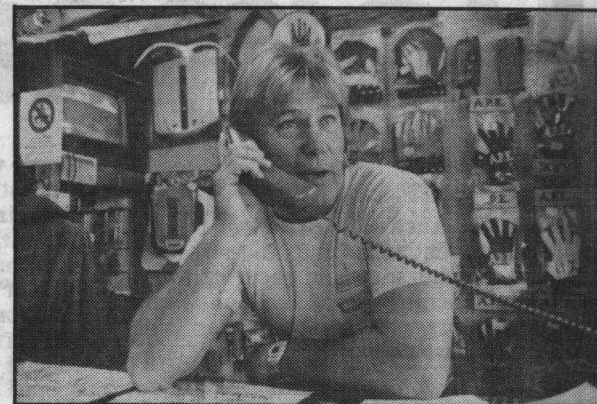
Frank DePalma, owner of Cafe DePalma, said he called the city shortly after the quake and was told no one would be able to look at the bridge for three months.

Soon Chi at Day's Market said she gets calls from over the hill during the summer asking how the weather is. Today, the calls ask if the bridge is open. "I tell them no," she said.



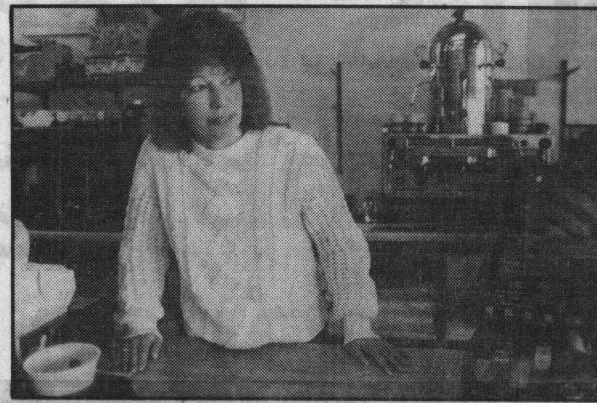
Dan Coyro

Linda Hopper: wrote plea to mayor



Dan Coyro

Cy Lucas: surf shop traffic down 90 percent.



Dan Coyro

Carla Rittue: 'It's kind of scary.'

REFERENCE