

Last Begonia grower gone from Capitola area

Antonelli Brothers moves to Watsonville

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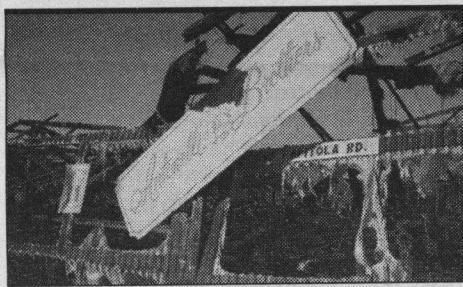
Antonelli Brothers was a favorite of begonia and fuchsia enthusiasts statewide for 70 years until the fire on March 8 2005. A large fire of suspicious origin swept through its three-acre facility destroying its off-photographed showroom, offices, and thousands of dormant begonia tubers.

Dennis Bobbitt, co-owner with his wife, Linda Antonelli Bobbitt the daughter of co-founder Pete Antonelli, had to make a decision on whether to rebuild or move. The Antonelli family had already sold most of its original 16 acres for residential development. After the death of Pat Antonelli in 2001, the last active brother of the original founders, soon followed by that of his son, Skip, manager of the nursery since 1981, Linda was left to carry on the family business.

In the early days, Antonelli Bros. also had a large wholesale business and was known for hybridizing and growing all its own begonia tubers. The Antonelli family was instrumental in developing Capitola's renown as the "Begonia Capital of the World" and in starting the Capitola Begonia Festival.

Celebrities who purchased Antonelli plants in past years include Shirley Temple Black, Madonna, Hugh Hefner, Martha Stewart and the late Bob Hope and Alfred Hitchcock.

Pasquale Antonelli was 19 years old when he came to Santa Cruz from north-



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ern Italy at the beginning of the 20th Century. He worked for the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Co., married and raised five sons and a daughter at their home on Capitola Rd.

One of the sons, Pat went to work for Vetterle & Reinelt Hybridizing Gardens, a local flower grower that had pioneered growing tuberous begonias in the Capitola area. Knowing a good thing, eventually four of the five Antonelli brothers went to work for the Vetterle & Reinelt.

Advancing to foreman, Pat had dreams of starting his own business. In 1935 Antonelli Bros. was started on four acres near the family home on Capitola Road growing to 16 acres over the years.

Over the years friendly competition between the Brown Bulb Ranch, Vetterle & Reinelt and Antonelli Bros. made Capitola the "Begonia Capitol of the World." The acres of begonias drew thousands of flower lovers each year to Capitola to stroll through the shaded lath houses during the summer filled with colorful rows of begonia blooms and baskets of fuchsias hanging overhead.

Antonelli Bros. still survives and is successfully selling begonias to the world from Watsonville through its website: www.antonellibegonias.com/

The last grower has left Capitola, but the flower still reigns. See you at the 2007 Begonia Festival.