

Capitola, Aptos booming

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — Many business owners in mid-county are reaping the benefits of a desirable locale.

And their success is, some say, at least partially coming at the expense of downtown Santa Cruz.

That was the sentiment from many questioned at Wednesday night's fourth annual Mid-County Business Showcase at Aptos Seaside. Hosted by the Capitola and

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Aptos chambers of commerce, it featured 92 businesses.

Almost to a person, chamber leaders and business owners cited the geographics of mid-county, with Capitola and Aptos

trally located, as the prime factor in their success. They said their central location makes it convenient for the majority of county residents.

"Sometimes it's hard for people to drive from one end of the county to the other," said Karen Hibble, co-manager of the Aptos Chamber of Commerce. "For convenience sake, they can go a shorter distance to get here, and it's one-stop shop-

John Lischer, executive director of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, views those opinions as relatively harmless boosterism.

"I just think they're pushing their area," he said. "There's been a lot of focus on downtown Santa Cruz. A lot of business people are being passed by so they're trying to do something about it."

Lischer said he could not dispute the reputation of the Pacific Garden Mall as a haven for transients.

"It's obviously something we've got to deal with," he said.

The mid-county business owners also said the trend in their direction is not a recent phenomenon, but has been taking place for years.

Big traffic woes downtown

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Spring break is not even here yet and the city's best-laid plan to detour beach traffic down Front Street may be doomed to failure.

The city hopes to detour up to 30,000 cars a day

this summer down Front Street to lower Pacific Avenue, then down to the beach via Washington while the Riverside Avenue bridge is rebuilt. The rebuilding had been planned long before the Oct. 17 earthquake because the bridge was heavily damaged.

"I was born and raised in Santa Cruz, but that (transient) element was definitely there," Cecchetti said. "We don't have to worry anymore about knifings on the mall or being called an (expletive deleted) by strangers. That element isn't here."

Cecchetti said her customers simply quit coming after her shop moved to Santa Cruz 3½ years ago. "It (the move) almost cost us our store," she said.

Tom McDannold, owner of Sign-A-Rama — a new store on 41st Avenue — cited geographics, traffic and the good business atmosphere for locating in mid-county.

However, everything is not perfect. Ever-increasing traffic, particularly on Highway 1, was a chief concern cited by many.

"If you have gridlock, customers aren't going to be able to get to us," said McDannold.

"The earthquake really hasn't had anything to do with the trend for businesses to relocate here," said Capitola Chamber Manager Toni Castro. "It's been happening for the last few years. Stores are opening second stores and businesses, especially banks, title companies and real estate offices, have opened branches here."

Despite the success of mid-county businesses, both Castro and Hibble said intra-county competition, particularly with downtown Santa Cruz, is not their intention.

"Our competition is not each other per se," said Hibble. "It's really San Jose. The more businesses that locate in our community and the more people do business here, the better our economy is going to be overall."

Added Castro, "Capitola is not reaping the benefits at the expense of Santa Cruz. We want to see Santa Cruz rebuild (after the earthquake). That will make it good for the entire county."

Hibble cited mid-county growth as a primary spur.

"You just have to look at the (increased) traffic on Highway 1 to see our growth," she said. "We've become the place where people are very much considering doing business."

Joanne Cecchetti, owner of Bridal Veil Fashions on 41st Avenue in Capitola — which recently moved from Front Street in downtown Santa Cruz — was not hesitant to cite the "transient element" as a critical factor of her move.

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ping."

Plenty of free parking, and a positive business climate were also cited. And, some business owners spoke out about shoppers not liking the number of transients in downtown Santa Cruz.

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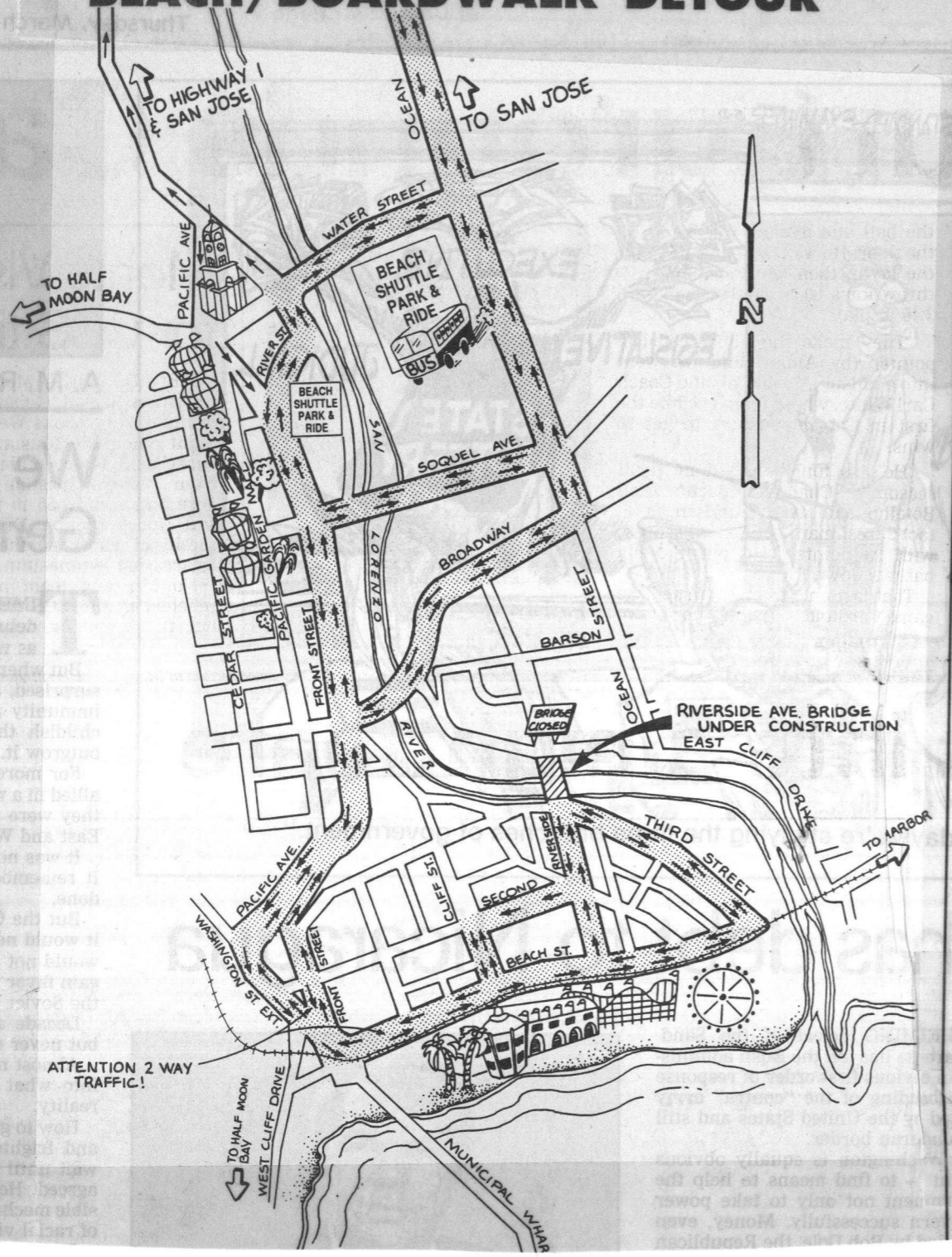
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BEACH/BOARDWALK DETOUR



Traffic/ Business owners worried

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ed in the 1982 flood. To try to accommodate the increased traffic load, 100 parking meters will be pulled out and Front Street will be striped for four lanes, according to city Traffic Engineer Chris Schneider.

But Front Street traffic the past couple of sunny weekends already reached such a state of gridlock that transit officials worry the Metro Center will be paralyzed this summer, and merchants are threatening to leave.

"I interviewed every business on my side of the street, and people just can't believe the turmoil already," said Mel Haber of Haber's Furniture. "Our clientele cannot get down here," he said.

"Many of the businesses will not be around if this continues," he warned. He said business owners and the Chamber of Commerce plan to seek a change before traffic gets any worse.

Transit District General Manager Scott Galloway said he is "worried tremendously."

Galloway fears that bumper-to-bumper traffic will block the Front Street driveway to the Metro Center, keeping buses from entering or leaving.

Traffic engineer Schneider said the ultimate plan calls for police to direct traffic at key intersections during peak periods. Galloway said he has spoken to the police about some kind of control at the Metro Center intersection.

If everything fails, Galloway said the district may have to just line its buses up at the sidewalk on the Pacific Avenue side of the Metro Center.

Even Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt concedes that traffic the past few sunny weekends has been horrible.

"There was a long planning period and the plan was well thought out," she said. "But clearly the volume of traffic in February, starting with the President's Day holiday weekend, has been

absolutely staggering."

She said she fears that even adding additional lanes down Front Street and starting the weekend beach shuttle earlier than expected may not solve early problems.

"We're not yet looking at the fairest evaluation, but the truth is those (additional improvements) may not be enough," she said.

Wormhoudt said she believes the city will have to reassess its plan.

Haber complains that the city never did listen to the business community's concerns about the detour.

"My personal view is that the city has not been supportive of business for the past 10 years. This may be the final straw. Stores either will close or be forced to relocate."

He said business owners had recommended that beach traffic be funneled down Chestnut Street, but the city gave in to concerns from the neighborhoods.

"The neighborhoods could survive a year (of disruption), the merchants can't," he maintains.

Front Street is one of the few viable downtown business streets remaining since the earthquake. Now it's threatened by gridlock.

Schneider said a detour down Chestnut Street was carefully considered, but it had even more drawbacks.

The biggest of many obstacles, he said, is the Chestnut and Laurel street intersection, which has no traffic lights.

Besides, Schneider said, studies show the best detour is the one which sticks closest to the original route. To detour beach traffic as far as Chestnut Street would lead to greater problems and confusion, he said.

The bottom line, says Wormhoudt, is that the problem is similar to trying to pour a gallon of milk into a quart container.

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