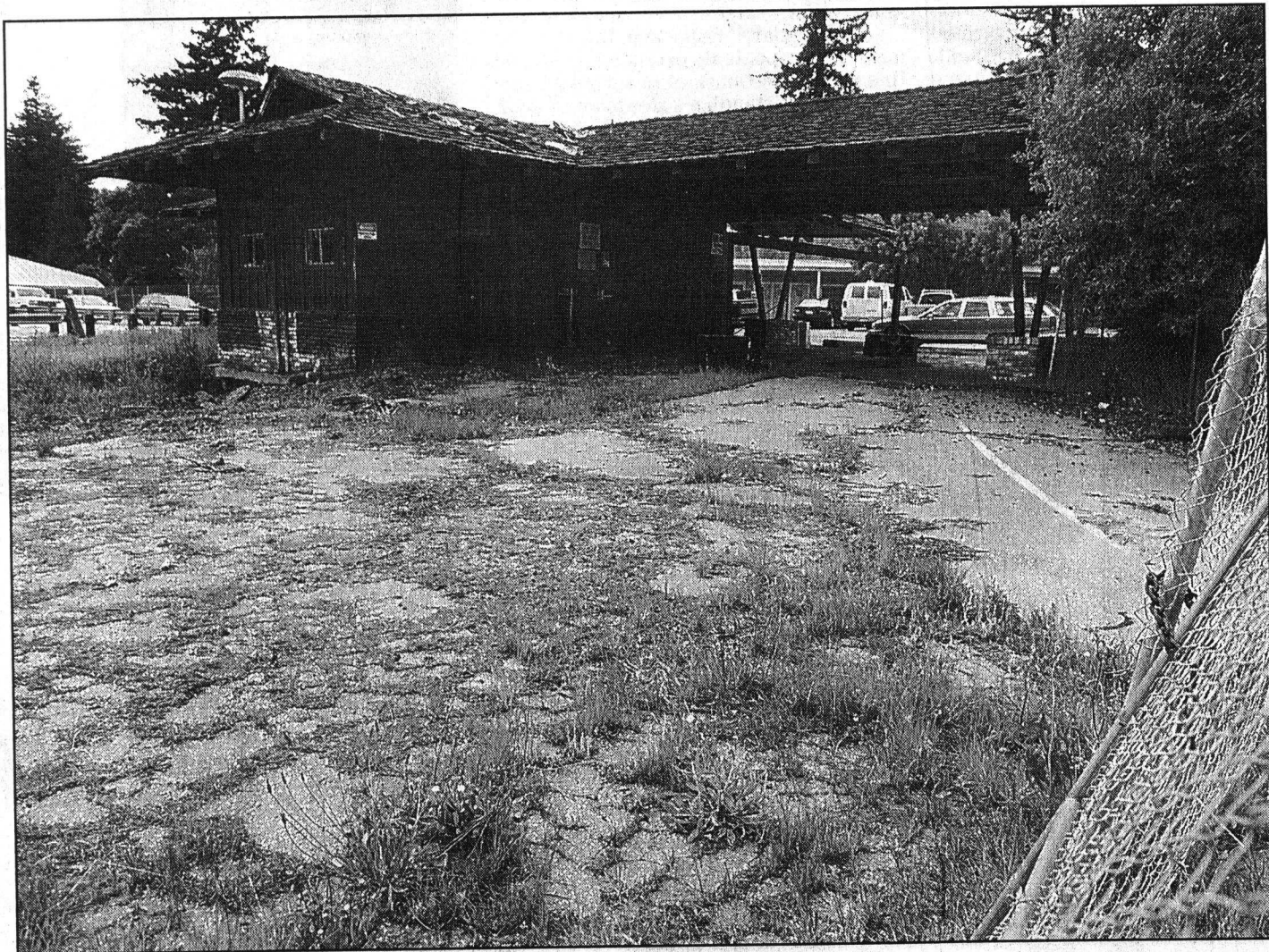


# End of a Terrible eyesore



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The new owner of the former Terrible Herbst station at Soquel Drive and Trout Gulch Road, which burned almost three years ago, plans to clean it up and put it back into service.

## Plans afoot to improve Aptos Terrible Herbst gas station

By JONDI GUMZ  
Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — Changes are in the works at a property long considered an eyesore in this upscale community.

The new owner of the former Terrible Herbst gas station, which was torched in a suspicious fire almost three years ago, has plans to clean up the site and eventually reopen.

"There are long-term plans to redevelop it," said Kurt Buehler, real estate manager for USA Petroleum, which bought 13 Terrible Herbst locations in California more than a year ago.

Buehler toured the Aptos location this week and met with Aptos fire chief Gary Smith, who had been considering taking formal action to force improvements.

"It's been kind of an eyesore and a nuisance," Smith said.

The vacant gas station, with its fire-blackened roof, is surrounded by weeds, in sharp contrast to the rest of Aptos Village, a collection of quaint shops and a bed and breakfast.

Two years ago, the condition of the property was rated the top concern of area residents surveyed by the Aptos Neighbors Association.

"It has been most discouraging," Aptos Chamber of Commerce director Karen Hibble said. "We'd love to see that corner cleaned up."

She hopes the company will follow the lead of another village property owner, who renovated a building that had been vacant since the 1989 earthquake. The Warmth Company, which had been in Soquel, moved there about a month ago. It sells furniture, linens, towels and

bathrobes.

Planner Martin Jacobson said the gas station property is in a neighborhood commercial zone, which allows retail use. The owner could apply to reopen as a gas station without any service bays, he said.

USA, which also owns gas stations in Soquel and Watsonville, is planning to remodel the Watsonville site and develop a "unique architecture" for the Aptos location, "something in keeping with the neighborhood," Buehler said.

An architect has yet to be chosen, he said. Typically, the company works on a basic design before hiring a local architect to work out the details.

Buehler said it took time to review all of the newly acquired properties.

"This location wasn't at the top of the list," he said.