

Anglers cross their fingers

Rush to finish boat ramp by April 2 salmon opener



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Construction diver Jason Graham works on the new boat launch ramp Wednesday at Santa Cruz harbor.

New launch facility should last 40 years

By **GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Hopefully, the first day won't be a joke.

April Fools' Day is the projected opening for the new launch ramp at the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor, a project that began in mid-November and should finish before sport salmon season starts April 2, said Kimbra Eldridge, harbor operations manager.

"They're a couple weeks behind schedule, but they're working frantically to make up for that," Eldridge said.

The new ramp is a \$2.2 million project paid for by a grant from the California Department of Boating and Waterways, Eldridge said. It replaces another ramp built about 40 years ago. Sea water and about 15,000 launches a year took their toll on the old ramp. The new steel pilings should last another four decades, Eldridge said.

Workers with Associated Pacific Contractors from Morro Bay have torn out the old ramp and now spend four, 10-hour days each week driving steel piles — a total of 40 when the



The new ramp is a \$2.2 million project paid for by a grant from the California Department of Boating and Waterways. It replaces another ramp built about 40 years ago.

job's done — into the harbor floor, Eldridge said. Soon they will piece concrete slabs together on top, Eldridge said, so trucks and SUVs can back boats into the water.

The workers are making their

mark on the harbor. A chain-link fence cordons off the parking lot work area, where a yellow-bodied crane towers next to the boat masts. Orange markers float in a semi-circle in the water, warning boats to avoid

the steel beams beneath.

Bill Rawson, manager of Shamrock Charters, said the repairs, while needed, can't be finished soon enough.

See **RAMP** on **PAGE A11**

Ramp

Continued from Page A1

"If it isn't done before salmon season, we're going to hang somebody," Rawson said. Shamrock Charters offers fishing and whale-watching trips, among other things, and a complete bait-and-tackle shop on the harbor.

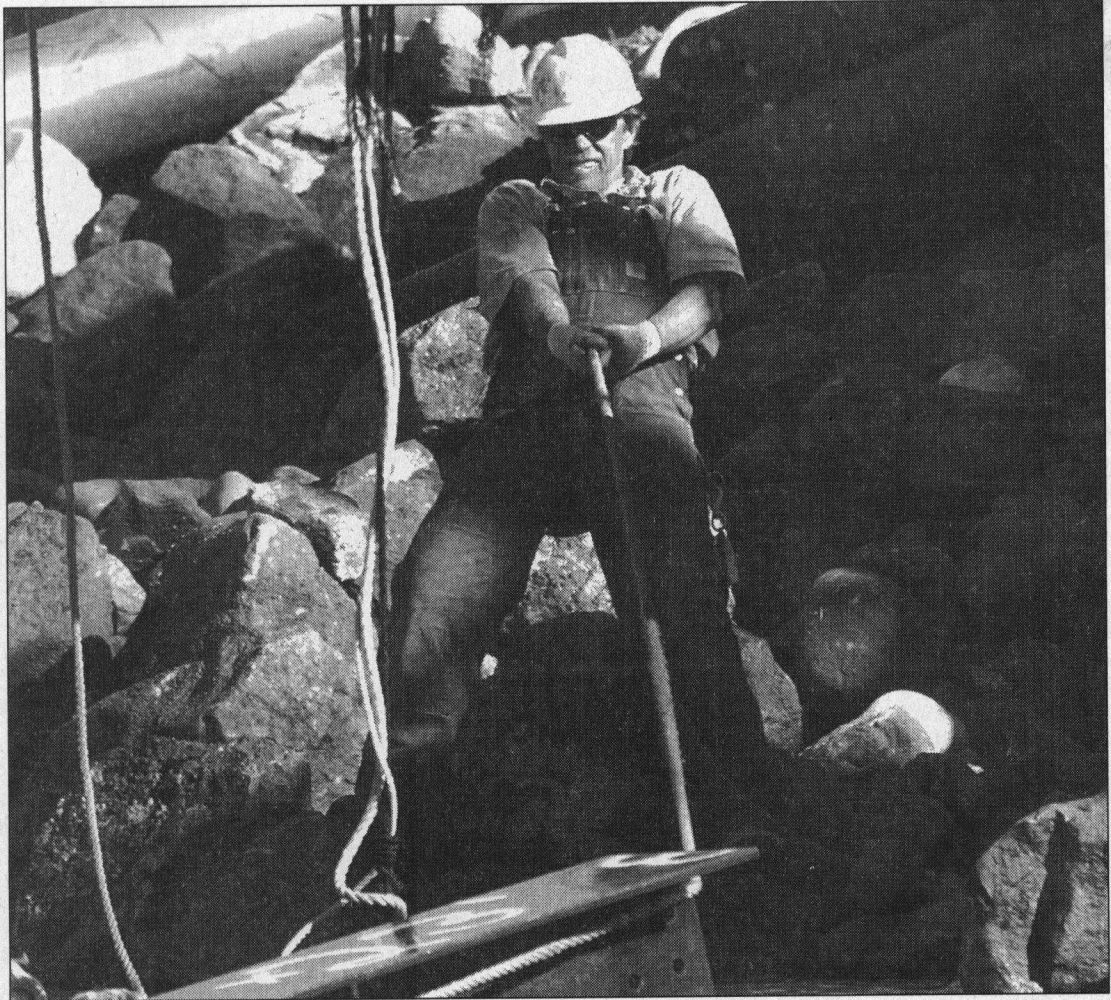
But Rawson doubted the new ramp — even with deeper grooves and new concrete — would stop vehicles from sliding into the water.

Between six and 10 times a year, rescuers often need a scuba diver and two tow trucks to haul a pickup or SUV out of the harbor.

Harbor officials recommend setting blocks behind tires to hold vehicles on the ramp in place, as water levels can rise quickly. But not everyone uses them.

A new ramp is "not going to solve losing vehicles," Rawson said, "because 80 percent of that is human error."

Contact Genevieve Book-walter at gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Dennis Dodson bulldozes the end of a steel beam into place during construction of the harbor's new boat-launch ramp earlier this week. Workers hope to finish before the start of salmon season.