

# Local

A-2—Monday, May 21, 1990 — Santa Cruz Sentinel

## Adobe owner walled in by repair bills

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WATSONVILLE — The once-proud Castro Adobe, the only remaining rancho-style adobe in the Pajaro Valley, is barely standing these days, a sad reminder of the power of the 7.1 earthquake.

But owner Edna Kimbro hasn't given up hope that her 3,800 square-foot home in the Calabasas area can be restored to its distinguished past.

Faced with a repair bill of well over \$300,000 that's beyond the family's means, Kimbro has turned to private foundations, the state and county for money to restore and acquire the home.

State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, has requested a \$307,000 grant from Proposition 70 funds (the California Wildlife, Coastal and Park Land Conservation Fund of 1988) to restore the hacienda, and the county is considering buying the adobe for public use.

But the main stumbling block with the county purchase is money.

"The overall project cost will be significant," said Ben Angove, director of the Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services Department.

In a letter to the supervisors, Angove outlined the financial investment the county will have to make to acquire the property. Purchase, renovation and repair of a private road that leads to the home bring the total cost to about \$900,000, under Angove's assessment.

Finding restoration and acquisition funds is possible through either state or county park fees, Angove said. He added he didn't know

where the road funds would come from, but that could be addressed later.

"I think the board might undertake it if the purchase price is not too high," Angove said.

Kimbro said she'd give the adobe to the county, if arrangements can be worked out to split her 10-acre parcel so she can build a home on the back lot.

Kimbro's family moved into the once-majestic adobe in July 1988, but after the earthquake tumbled a wall and cracked others, they were left homeless.

In January, they moved into a trailer on their land supplied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

To Kimbro, who's devoted much of her adult life to restoring adobes, there isn't any question the adobe should be preserved.

The two-story Castro Adobe is one of only four Californio-era adobes in the county, and by far the largest one, Kimbro said.

It was built as the main hacienda of the Juan Jose Castro family sometime between 1846 and 1850 and has been painstakingly maintained over the years, she said. The Castros eventually lost the home in 1874, after years of litigation over the Mexican land grant, she said.

The hacienda is on the National Register, state inventory of historical buildings, and is rated a "one" — the highest rating — on the county's listing of historical sites.

"The county has identified it as 'to be preserved' to whatever ends that takes," Kimbro said.

In his letter for Prop. 70 funds,



Edna Kimbro and son, Joey, at their adobe home, damaged in last October's earthquake.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Mello cited the adobe as a "distinguished architectural monument to the building prowess of the Mexican settlers. In a portion of Santa Cruz County that is currently censused at 60 percent Hispanic, the

Castro Adobe is a symbol of Chicano pride and culture."

Although the adobe has been reinforced over the years and was structurally shored up following the 1906 earthquake, the north-

south movement of the Loma Prieta earthquake proved too much for the end walls.

Much of the south wall has collapsed and deep cracks can be seen in the north wall. Part of the origi-

nal kitchen tottered over. The other walls and roof were secured to the floor joists by large wall braces, but cracks can be seen in the west and east walls, too.

"It can't wait to be restored," Kimbro said. "These buildings deteriorate rapidly when they're exposed to rain and wind. The sooner you strengthen it, the less you need to do to restore it."

With the possibility looming of another big earthquake, this time on the Hayward Fault, or a series of aftershocks, Kimbro said, "I'm very anxious to see this building strengthened as soon as possible."

Kimbro knows of what she speaks. She's spent the past few years studying seismic reinforcement of adobes in Italy and France and was contemplating a renovation project for her home suggested by her Italian mentor when the earthquake struck.

"It was ironic," she sighed. "Adobe preservation is my whole life's focus. But a couple of years ago, I realized that seismic reinforcement was the most important issue with these adobes and I was beginning to work on that."

The county would like to turn the Castro Adobe into a multi-purpose building, possibly housing a historical society or public agency, Angove said. Part of it could be restored as a museum, while the large room upstairs would be ideal for meetings, he said.

The ultimate arbiter will be funding, Kimbro said. If funds can be located, the community will have the Castro Adobe as a reminder of its Mexican heritage.