

A vision is brewing



If two local entrepreneurs have their way, the former Cat N Canary clothing store at Cathcart and Pacific avenues will become an upscale brew pub.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Two Santa Cruz men want to create new brew pub in former downtown clothing store

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SANTA CRUZ — A couple of young, local entrepreneurs have signed a lease to build an upscale brewery and restaurant in the vacant downtown building once home to the Cat N Canary clothing store.

With a new lease in hand for the 7,400 square foot corner spot on Cathcart Street and Pacific Avenue, Mike Ciampa and Guy Bahringer now have to navigate the city's alcohol ordinance.

They envision the Deepwater Coastal Brewery, a 4,600 square foot restaurant with an outdoor beer garden. There professionals could enjoy freshly brewed ale and lager and a good meal made by a local chef.

Cathcart Street used to signal "the end" of the Pacific Garden Mall.

With the opening this week of the new five-story University Towne Center on one corner, a proposed housing and office complex on another and a brewery/restaurant on another, that corner would be remade.

"We personally feel that this will be good for Santa Cruz in general," Ciampa said. "We will provide employment and be a good local place for tourists and locals as well."

They are going for "a coastal feel."
"We don't want to be too pretentious, but we want to be nice," Ciampa said. "We hope to capitalize on people being proud of an establishment they can say originated in Santa Cruz."

That is, if Ciampa, 29, and Bahringer, 27, and their unidentified investment backers are able to step over legal hurdles.

The politics of serving alcohol in Santa Cruz, a town with almost twice as many liquor establishments than the average of towns of similar size, is a dicey road.

In 1995, the city initiated strict controls on new alcohol-selling establishments to curb their proliferation in areas where there is already a concentration of businesses that sell alcohol.

The heavy tourist and university-age pop-

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ulation in Santa Cruz has contributed to an abundance of drinking places.

Nearby drinking establishments such as Club Dakota, Rosie McCann's Irish Pub & Restaurant, and 99 Bottles of Beer On The Wall Restaurant & Pub, have all managed to establish themselves downtown.

Mayor Catherine Beiers said that a brewery and restaurant wouldn't be her first choice for a new tenant on the mall, but the road to create an entertainment district downtown has already been paved.

Noting the proximity of nearby drinking establishments, Beiers said she is concerned about creating competition with existing business.

"We really need a type of retail that meets the people's need, a linen shop, a place to buy underwear," Beiers said.

But Ciampa said the establishment is designed to fit a new niche, not compete directly with other local businesses.

Gerry Turgeon, longtime owner of the Santa Cruz Brewing Co & Front Street Pub around the corner, agrees. He says they would serve a different clientele.

"I would welcome them," Turgeon said. "I've always looked at downtown Santa Cruz, in particular, restaurants and breweries, as

the more the merrier. It makes for more of a community. We want to make downtown more of a destination."

Turgeon notes, however, that Santa Cruz is a challenging place to run an alcohol business.

"Santa Cruz is a place where it kind of has the brakes on," Turgeon said. "The climate and the political feeling I get is: We don't want people to have too much fun," and when they do have too much it gets the attention of the authorities and they tend to crack down."

Ciampa, a UC Santa Barbara graduate, and Bahringer, a UC Santa Cruz graduate, are just completing lengthy internships at Silicon Valley pubs — Gordan Biersch Brewery Restaurant and the Los Gatos Brewing Co.

"We've learned the ins and outs of being a successful restaurateur," Ciampa said.

The pair believe they are arriving in the midst of a downtown renaissance providing perfect clientele — young, successful high tech workers.

The pair hope to pick up on the office lunch crowd, and offer professionals somewhere new for dinner.

"We want to make that corner even better," Bahringer said. "The downtown association wants to bring the south end of the mall down to Laruel Street rather than Cathcart, that's where we're at. We want to beautify that area."

Michael Schmidt, Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce chief executive officer, said it sounds ideal. "It should add more life and vitality to that corner."

Schmidt discounts the idea that having fewer alcohol outlets in a community drives down drinking rates.

"I have not personally seen any data that if you have more or fewer outlets that has any impact on alcohol consumption," Schmidt said. "It means you have twice as much competition in the marketplace."