



PLOWING AHEAD Demolition of old tannery structures (above, right) are already under way, paving the way for the future Tannery Arts Center.

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Tanneries

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Taming the Tannery

The Tannery Arts Center moves ahead, but still accepts suggestions from county residents | by Bruce Willey

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It's almost been a year since proponents of the Tannery Arts Center held the first community forum to discuss and debate concerns, air opinions and, in general, reveal the plan to turn the eight-acre historic tannery into what is envisioned as an art Mecca of the county. Now, a new crop of community forums—a tannery salon, if you will—will be reaching out to the mountains, Mid-county and Watsonville residents.

Like the preceding forums, those who are interested in the project can offer suggestions for what they would like the arts center to become. The interaction will be hands-on, with art materials at the ready to spark ideas. In addition there will be presentations by some of the former workers at the tannery to give the historical perspective, and a general overview of the project.

"This county is like an incubator for artists," says Hina Pendle, one of the mediators in the

forums. "But it's very difficult for artist to live here. This project will be the nucleus that can help artists throughout the county, and help make art the new industry here."

Located near the Highway 1 and River Street intersection along the banks of the San Lorenzo River, the Tannery Arts Center is a multi-faceted affair with a 100 affordable living units for low- and very low-income artists, art studios, performance arts and music hall, and office space for local nonprofit arts groups.

"The arts industry in Santa Cruz County is taking its rightful place alongside entertainment and the natural wonders of Santa Cruz as a draw, an attraction for visitors to the county," says George Newell, the project director.

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life (146 years), Salz Leathers produced some of the West Coast's finest leather, which came to be known as California saddle leather for its distinct golden color. The tannery ceased operation in 2001, a victim of globalization.

The Santa Cruz City Redevelopment Agency will close escrow with the property owner this spring. Deconstruction of some of the buildings is taking place now, and will be completed at the end of February. The owner is also cleaning up some of the toxic waste in the soil, a process expected to be completed by July. The developer, Art Space, will likely be applying for building permits in early summer and hopes to break ground for the housing portion of the project sometime next fall. Recently, the State Department of Housing and Community Development loan committee granted permission for an \$8.4 million loan, the first major hurdle to finance

the housing portion of the project.

"It is retaining some of the historical fabric of the community," says Ceil Cirillo, executive director of the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency. "In its own sense, the [Salz] Tannery was an artistic venture because they supplied the leather to many designers. It gives the community a way to honor and showcase its local artists."

Tannery Arts Center Community Conversations will be held 7-9 p.m. throughout the county. Refreshments will be provided. For more information call, 662-2232 or see www.tanner-yartscenter.org. Feb. 2, Ramsey Park Family Center, 1301 Main St., Watsonville. Feb. 9, Live Oak Senior Center, 1777 Capitola Rd., Santa Cruz. Feb. 23, Felton Community Hall, 6191 Highway 9, Felton.