

FELTON

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Officials sold on Felton auction barn

■ Leaders hope the 75 to 100 sales each year at the new building will help revitalize downtown.

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Civic leaders in the San Lorenzo Valley are thrilled about Felton's newly opened auction barn, saying it will provide a much-needed boost to the business community.

“This is probably the biggest news to hit the area in 20 years,” said Jeanette Guire, incoming president of the San Lorenzo Valley Chamber of Commerce. “From our standpoint, it's the cornerstone for the revitalization of the area. It's a wonderful addition to the town.”

The two-story building, off Highway 9 next to the bowling alley, is the first major addition to downtown Felton in years.

Owner Bob Slawinski expects to have 75 to 100 auctions a year at

Slawinski Auction Barn. Some will benefit local charities. Others, like the art and antique auctions, draw buyers from around the country who usually shop and dine in the area before returning home.

This is the first permanent home for the auctioneer. He previously held auctions at a Boulder Creek church, the old Felton community center and under a tent on the new site.

For the new barn, Slawinski salvaged redwood and fir from a Salinas food processing plant that was being demolished. He trucked the wood to Felton and remilled it on the construction site. Underneath 90 years of weathering Slawinski uncovered a carpenter's dream.

“It was absolutely the finest wood

you could get, not a single knot,” Slawinski said. “It was incredibly beautiful lumber from (first growth) trees cut down 100 years ago.”

Inspired by the historic Felton Covered Bridge, which stands about 100 yards away, Slawinski designed the structure to reflect the town's heritage.

“It's the best technology from today and yesterday, tied together in a package that complements each other,” Slawinski said. “It's a mixture of the old and new that's energy-efficient and strikingly beautiful.”

The barn has drawn praise from many, including the outgoing president of the local chamber.

“As his neighbor, I'm just thrilled to death,” said Marge Ann Wimpee, who owns Typee graphics in Felton. “It's a beautiful building, and it will give people more reason to come to the valley.”

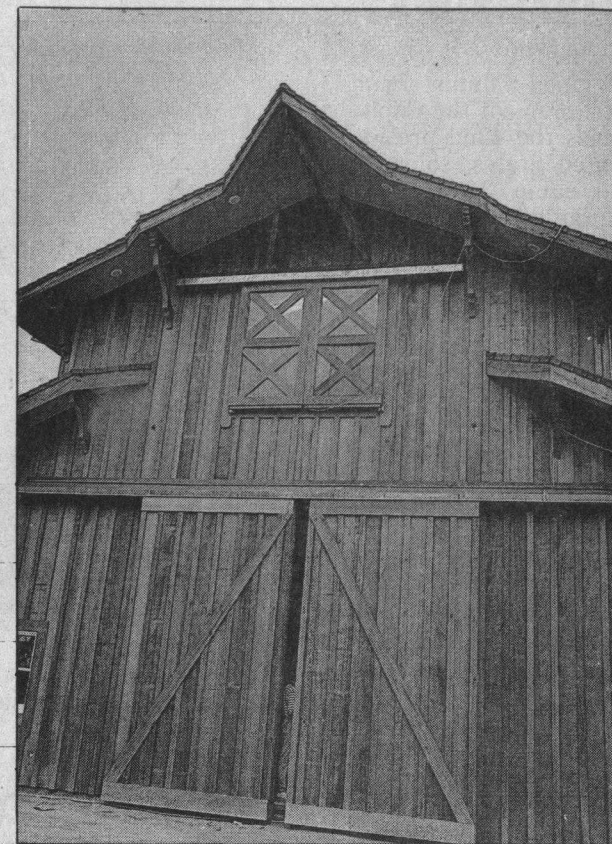
Slawinski, who has been long involved in civic activities, said he will make the barn available to community groups when business allows. That offer is especially welcome because the town has been without a public center since the Felton Community Hall burned down two years ago.

The barn can accommodate 500 people. By design, the first two events will be fund-raisers held in February for the Felton Fire Department and the Valley Churches United.

“I really believe business people have to return things to the community,” Slawinski said.

An antique dealer-turned-auctioneer, Slawinski said the building, which took 4½ months to build, was a joy to work on.

“For the last 28 years, my job's been basically recycling fine furniture, antiques people really loved and took care of,” he said. “This building is an extension of that type of thing.”



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The facility will benefit the community and charities.