

Boulder Creek business changing

By KAREN CLARK
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BOULDER CREEK — Vacant storefronts, giant for-sale signs and going-out-of-business banners dot the downtown core, forcing community leaders to re-evaluate their retail future.

"The town is moving from a quaint, quirky sort of retail environment to something that's definitely more upscale," said Doug Andrews, general manager of Business with Pleasure and chairman of Main Street's Economic Restructuring Committee.

Boulder Creek leaders emphasized that the rash of business changes in the past few months cannot be attributed to a single factor, such as bad business practices or the economy.

"Each one had its own individual situation," said Elaine Jackson, owner of Sincerely Yours and president of the Boulder Creek Business Association. "It's a coincidence this has all happened at once."

Among the changes facing the Boulder Creek business community:

- Karan's Deli is for sale.
- Joe Palooka's restaurant has closed.
- The historic Basham House building is for sale.
- Rumpel's clothing is in the midst of a going-out-of-business sale. (Owner Barry Albright said, however, that the positive reaction to his sale prices has convinced him to remake his business into a clothing outlet center.)
- Country Harvest Bakery, a longtime business in the community, unexpectedly closed its doors just two weeks ago.

"The rumors are flying that Boulder Creek is going out of business," said Barbara Kennedy, owner of The Country Home and head of the San Lorenzo Valley Main Street organization. "That's simply not true."

The impression that business is hurting in Boulder Creek may have been fueled in large part by the sudden closing of Country Harvest.

"It sent a real shock wave through Boulder Creek when it closed. No one had any warning," said Andrews. "Although it's tempting to get the impression the town is going down the tubes ... I actually think it's a turning point for the town."

Andrews said business owners must recognize there is "a largely unseen, unrecognized population in and around Boulder Creek" that has ties to large corporations, either by commuting to work over the hill or telecommuting out of their homes.

"I see the evidence of large amounts of spendable money," said Andrews, who believes that businesses catering to this more upscale crowd will be successful. "The trend is going to be, like it or not, toward the likes of Saratoga and Los Gatos."

Businesses in those towns, said Andrews, "aren't selling the necessities of life. They're selling nice things. Nice things to eat. Nice things to wear. Nice services."

Albright, who estimated he has seen 150 stores come in and then go out of business in his 23 years as



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Business with Pleasure general manager Doug Andrews believes Boulder Creek businesses need to cater to more upscale clientele.

a Boulder Creek retailer, disagreed that the future of the town rests with its ability to attract upscale businesses.

"I've never seen an upscale crowd in Boulder Creek," said Albright. "People who are upscale don't shop here, period."

He said the town needs more retail shops that offer competitive prices, good quality and a variety of choice. Those kinds of businesses, he said, would encourage valley residents to shop locally rather than travel to Santa Cruz, Capitola or San Jose.

"The consumer is smarter today," said Albright. "They want a better price. ... I've watched outlet stores pop up like corn all across the county, and I'm going for a pricing thing."

Both Andrews and Jackson said an upscale restaurant or bakery that offered fax service to people coming home from over the hill who want their food waiting when they arrive would do well in town. Jackson pointed to the Coffeetopia shop, which she said is "trendy, well done and it's thriving."

Jackson said the business association has tried to

attract new kinds of retail stores to the community, especially in the two weeks since the bakery closed.

"I always look at it as an opportunity simply because any new business coming into town is a shot in the arm," she said.

Andrews said catering to a more upscale crowd would require more than finding the right product.

"Boulder Creek can continue to have charm, but it's going to have to be something more desirable to people who have more money to spend," said Andrews. "It will require people who are willing to make an investment and who have the right perspective: a more polished presentation and a more focused presentation. We have a really good base already."

Patrick DeMora, vice president and manager of Liberty Bank in Boulder Creek, said he believed the town could make such a transition.

"I've seen it before in Capitola," said DeMora. "At one time they were struggling, and they adapted. ... It's time Boulder Creek is part of that economic process."