

# The Bus Stop: La Selva Beach's 'Nerve Center'



Elena Hiles, between hamburgers and bowls of soup, stays busy as La Selva's in-lieu postmaster in a corner of The Bus Stop.

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La Selva Beach is not the Land That Time Forgot; more like just the land that time didn't care all that much about.

It's better off being that way.

You could put the whole commercial center in a good-sized bus station. Appropriately, the epicenter is the bus stop and The Bus Stop.

All the buses stop at the bus stop: Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, Valencia School, Aptos Jr. High and Aptos High. And just about all the town stops at The Bus Stop.

Which masquerades as a combination delicatessen-post office, but in reality is a combination city hall-coffee klatch.

Tom Patterson, who publishes La Selva's newspaper, Beachcomber, calls The Bus Stop the town's "nerve center."

It's the only downtown spot where you can sit down, have a cup of coffee and just meet people. And if you've been in La Selva long enough, your coffee will come in a cup with your own name on it.

Well, it doesn't really come to you; you get it yourself.

Ron Hiles owns The Bus Stop. He's possibly the most important individual in Santa Cruz County, since he not only operates the equivalent of the city hall, but is the fire chief

and postmaster as well. But for eight hours a day he works for the county parks department.

The Bus Stop belongs to Hiles and his wife, Elena, but it's Elena who runs it most of the time and serves as the acting postmaster.

On a typical afternoon last week, she was waiting to ring up the sale of a dish of ice cream and cup of coffee when a post office customer came in.

"I'll help you in the post office in just a minute," she said.

The Bus Stop looks kind of like it came out of the 50s. Only it's a little old fashioned for that time. Better, too.

The teenagers who come to The Bus Stop don't act much like 50s teens, either.

One of them, a modern teen through and through, sat quietly in a corner reading a book. He finished his coffee, brushed down the sleeves of his embroidered jacket, fished his necklace outside his shirt collar and said, "Thank you" to Elena.

But he didn't, thankfully, say, "Have a nice day."

A young woman in a light summer blouse delivered some

restaurant supplies to Elena. She wanted to check on the status of a sandwich promise she evidently had received earlier.

"Now can I have a reuben?" she announced, and proceeded to launch into a gossip about somebody who was having "a hassle with the kids."

The deli was as quiet as the rest of the town at 3 p.m. on Thursday. There was a brief interruption: "Do you sell stamps?" from a newcomer, but the only other noise for a while was a humming from the ice cream box.

Elena was out of many of the exotic ice cream flavors because of the mid-January sunburst weather.

She said the coffee club, the informal non-city council, gathers at about 10 a.m. every day. "And we have a help-yourself situation."

It's not hard to help yourself. The personalized coffee cups, some furnished by the club members and some by The Bus Stop, hang on a rack near the ever-ready coffee warmer. So far, there are 45 cups.

The Bus Stop serves soup, chili, hot and cold sandwiches,

Elena-made salad and pies, hamburgers and fountain drinks.

The self-effacing deli-marm admits The Bus Stop is getting by but not making a mountain of money "mainly because I'm such a poor manager."

She said the Hileses bought the place after a week's consideration, although they never had been in such a business before.

They have lived in La Selva Beach eight years, but have been proprietors of The Bus Stop only 1½ years.

Hiles is the postmaster in name only, Elena maintains. She says she does most of the postmastering. They get \$200 a month for the chore.

Neither is Hiles' job as fire chief a bed of thornless roses, Elena said. "He gets stuck with all the changes and waxing."

Both the male and female members of a young couple that came in appeared to subscribe to a thoroughly emancipated life style. They may or may not have reached 20, but if they had, they weren't far on the uphill side of their teens.

The young man asked for a dish of salad and a bowl of chili.

The man and woman shared the salad and chili, exchanging bite opportunities between the two dishes.

The man had poured himself a cup of after-chili coffee and asked Elena, who was in the small kitchen behind the counter, if he could add a couple of cookies to his coffee saucer.

She told him sure, that she'd collect the money later.

An older La Selva resident came in from the street in a pair of green sweat pants, apparently after a run to improve his physical stamina.

Not a dedicated athlete, he wasn't even breathing hard.

He seemed to have few problems, but most of the other people who came in that day had several.

Like a bartender, Elena heard about all the troubles. Like a humanitarian, she registered sympathy every time.

Either Elena hasn't been at her job as a postal worker long enough, or the current price of stamps hasn't been in effect long enough.

She was unable to come up with an immediate answer to "How much is nine times 13?"

But she makes good chili.

## Bridge Club Robbed

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Police were searching today for four gunmen who held up a Wilshire area bridge club and robbed more than 40 players of their wallets and jewelry estimated worth thousands of dollars.

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