

ProBuild rebranding local locations

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Contractors applaud the return of San Lorenzo Lumber

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ — ProBuild, the national chain operating lumberyards in Santa Cruz, Felton and Salinas and millwork centers in Santa Cruz and Soquel, is rebranding those locations as San Lorenzo Lumber, a move cheered by local contractors.

That was the name when the company was founded in 1936.

"We made a decision to revert back to the historical name in the

Santa Cruz area," said Jennifer Thurman, ProBuild's vice president of communications, from her Denver office. "It has more familiarity in that community."

She noted the company's business model in Santa Cruz is different than in other markets, with more sales to consumers and repair-and-remodel customers.

There is no change in staffing or ownership, she said.

Customers got a letter two weeks ago announcing the

change.

"Personally, I love it," Kevin Gallagher of KG Construction said of the name change. "I haven't noticed a single difference yet. I think that's because they're still associated with ProBuild. But through all the years of ownership changes and name changes, I still find myself (and my guys) referring to it as San Lorenzo. I probably won't think of it any differently. It may not be a local company like Big Creek Lumber, but I do prefer the new name."

Dean Mazzei of Mazzei Construction, a third-generation Santa Cruz native, and David Smith of Santa Cruz Portable Sawmill agreed.

"Santa Cruzans always refer to buildings by their 'original' or most long-standing tenants," added Lydia Corser, owner of Greenspace.

General contractor Trevor Paxton of Paxton Pacific noted ProBuild kept the Santa Cruz

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crew after taking over the operations.

"Maintaining a long-term relationship with the people in the store and the yard is what makes the difference," he said.

Ownership changed in 2004 when brothers Mike and Bob Butcher sold San Lorenzo Lumber to Lumbermens of Washington Inc.

Lumbermens was acquired by Lanoga Corp., which was acquired by Fidelity Capital, a division of Fidelity Investments in Boston, in 2006 for \$1.14 billion.

The big issue for ProBuild is that the company was created in February 2006 through acquisitions, with top dollar paid, just before the housing bubble burst.

ProBuild employed 14,000 people at 420 locations in 38 states, and analysts forecasted 2006 revenue would top \$6 billion.

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To view a video of the ProBuild interview, visit santacruzsentinel.com and click on this link.

Investors have had to be patient. ProBuild's revenue dropped to \$3 billion in 2009 in the grip of the recession.

Forbes reported ProBuild had 9,200 employees at 450 locations in 45 states with

revenue of \$3.6 billion as of December.

In Santa Cruz County, construction jobs shrank with the recession and recovery lagged other sectors.

University of the Pacific economist Jeffrey Michael, who tracks the local economy for the Santa Cruz County Business Council, is forecasting construction jobs to take the lead this year and grow 3.6 percent.

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