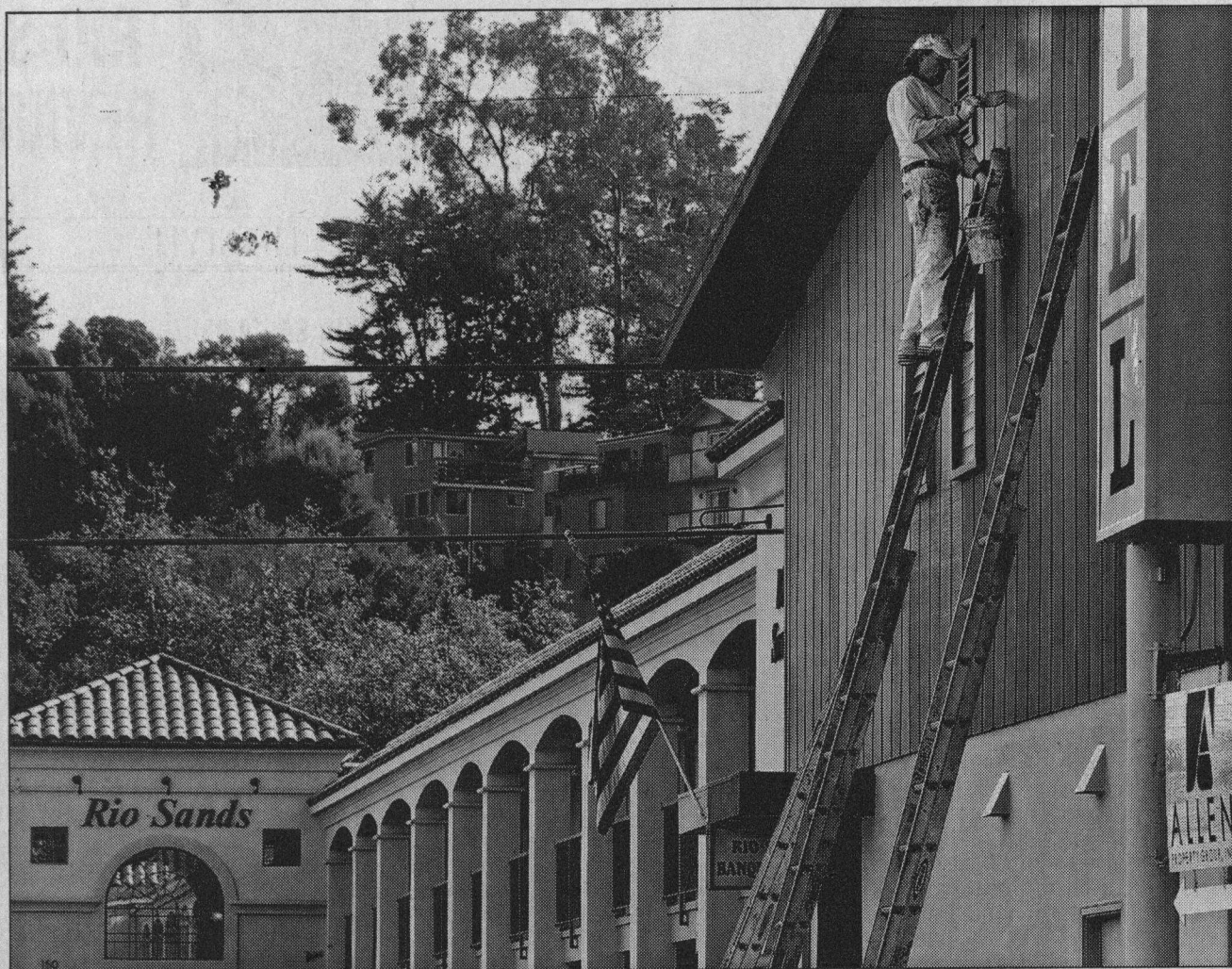


## TOURISM



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Tom Hartje adds some finishing touches to the exterior paint job of the remodeled Rio Sands Motel in Rio del Mar on Monday. Rio Sands hosted an open house Tuesday to celebrate completion of a \$1.5 million remodel.

# Makeover complete at Rio Sands

Motel shows off remodel; Rio del Mar residents seek creek solution

*Hotels and Boarding Houses*

By JONDI GUMZ

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RIO DEL MAR — October occupancy at the 50-room Rio Sands Motel was up 30 percent this year following a \$1.5 million makeover.

Owner Lou Bartfield called his housekeepers and maintenance workers heroes for keeping the motel operating despite the construction.

"It was a challenge," said Bartfield's son-in-law Steven Allen. "We slowed down during the busiest three months."

Aptos architect Robert Goldspink designed a new foyer, two Mediterranean-style towers and enclosures for the second story walkways. The motel, which is a block from the beach, sports new exterior hues: sage, wheat and terra cotta.

Rooms include a flat-screen television, coffee maker, microwave and refrigerator. More rooms got new stoves,

which families often request, and new Tempur-Pedic and Sweda Memory Foam mattresses were purchased.

About 60 people attended an Aptos chamber mixer Tuesday to showcase the remodel.

"Awesome," said Duf Fischer, who spent 21 years in the travel business.

"I really like the junior suites — good rates, too," said Ana Brantley, who owns Tranquille Spa and has stayed at the Rio Sands many times.

"I love the backyard," said Dale Crable, owner of Jungle Plants. "They're capitalizing on what a beautiful spot this is."

Guest services manager Raquel Melenudo showed off the pool, which is heated year-round to 80 degrees, the barbecue area, a popular family gathering spot, and the 80-seat banquet room where continental breakfast is served.

She said two employees

were hired to keep the motel open 24/7, with the idea of attracting freeway business.

Room rates range from \$49 per night in the winter to \$270 per night in the summer.

Allen pointed to other neighborhood makeovers: Cafe Rio, remodeled under new ownership, sewer line work, which had disrupted traffic, mostly completed, and new plantings, thanks to the Rio Del Mar Improvement Association.

The improvement residents would really like to see has to do with Aptos Creek.

"That creek needs to be corrected so it's not spoiling the sand," said Zel Longacre, a real estate agent who has lived in the area since 1959. "It's a health hazard. The state should take care of it."

The creek cuts through the sand toward the cliff, creating a large lagoon that attracts ducks and birds which contaminate the water.

In years past, a bulldozer would show up and create a new, more direct path for the creek to reach Monterey Bay but that practice was stopped to protect the tidewater goby and steelhead trout. Any action involving protected fish would require a half dozen permits from various regulatory agencies.

About 200 people attended a meeting sponsored by the homeowners group three weeks ago to discuss the problem. One approach is to form a nonprofit to hire a consultant to write a proposal for consideration by regulators.

"The county has no money to remediate the situation," said Steve Johnson, a resident since 1998. "The agencies have to cooperate."

"If people can't access the beach, it's not good for business," said Allen, noting going to the beach is the No. 1 tourist activity in the county.

"We want to find a solution."