

DARLING B&B SEND-OFF

Long-time community activists 'really, really' ready to retire



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Darrell and Karen Darling are retiring after 33 years of operating the Darling House bed and breakfast. They've invited more than 200 to peruse the furniture up for sale.

By Jessica A. York

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SANTA CRUZ » Innkeepers and social activists Darrell and Karen Darling signed out their last paying customer from their quintessential Santa Cruz Darling House bed-and-breakfast early this month, the ending of a 33-year run.

Clasping hands occasionally as they spoke, the childhood sweethearts are "77 and we're ready to not work so hard," said Karen Darling.

On Saturday, the couple will host an event they dubbed the

Darling House Really Really Retirement Final Fling Party, a celebratory goodbye and fundraiser for some of their favorite local nonprofits: Resource Center for Nonviolence, Beach Flats Community Center and Monterey Bay-Middlebury Scholarships in honor of their son Adam Darling. They are expecting as many as 200 attendees.

Prior to opening their B&B on West Cliff Drive overlooking Cowell Beach, Darrell Darling served as a Methodist minister for 25 years and moved his family to several parishes through the years before arriving in Santa Cruz. The two occupations

shared much in common, he said.

"There's more than one way to serve in a ministry than to serve as a full-time pastor," Darrell Darling said. "We have breakfast here every morning. I would say that there have been far more counseling at a deep level and conversations about politics and culture and theology and biblical conversations, life conversations, than I ever had in the church."

Most importantly, he said, Darrell Darling could do the work side-by-side with his wife.

Another factor in their decision to retire is that their daughter, Denise Wyldbore, inn man-

ager and a partner in running the business for the better part of a decade, is going with her husband to his native Australia for a time, the Darlings said.

This weekend's event is not the first time the Illinois-native Darlings have tried to exit the business, but it is the first time in the last decade that the housing market has rebounded to a promising level. The two, who call the inn home, plan to move to some undetermined single-story home in Santa Cruz, once they sell the property, where they can spending dedicated time reading and writing.

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Darling

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"It's in escrow. We're moving forward with the sale," Darrell Darling said of the three-story 1910 Mission Revival-style home at Gharkey Street. "This seemed to be the right time, with the confluence of a rising market and advancing years, for us."

Though the Darlings declined to discuss the fine details of the pending sale, the house was listed most recently for \$6.25 million. The new owner — only the seventh in 106 years — "wants to keep the architecture and the character of the house preserved as it is," Darrell Darling said. The city bed and breakfast permit goes with the land, so the new owner could potentially follow in the Darlings' footsteps and run their own inn, they said.

Sitting in their living room, the Darlings and their guests through the years have a front-row seat to Santa Cruz's most popular tourist beaches and surf breaks. The eight-bedroom home has served as the Darling House bed-and-breakfast since 1984, an operational permit that took them a year and 12 public hearings to secure.

The pages of the Darling House's guest book have filled with signatures and notes from the likes of soon-to-be first lady Hillary Clinton, singer-songwriter



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The Darling House master bedroom looks out over Cowell surf break and the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf.

Joan Baez, Andy Griffith and Robert Kennedy Jr. One five-star reviewer on online business review site Yelp described her experience at the Darling House in January as "a joy," adding that the Darlings "are the parents that everyone wishes they had and the home is a work of art." Some reviewers took issue with the dated state of their accommodations, while others liberally praised the "old-timey feel."

Karen Darling has served as the chairwoman for the Democratic Women's Club of Santa Cruz County and worked as a Hillary Clinton delegate for the Democratic National Convention in Denver during the

2008 presidential election. Darrell Darling is a past chairman of the Santa Cruz County Democratic Central Committee. The two even turned their 55-year anniversary party into a celebration for same-sex marriages legalization after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Proposition 8 in 2013.

Former Santa Cruz Mayor Mike Rotkin, who has long held leadership positions within the local Democratic party organizations, said he has spent countless Saturdays at the Darlings', often for liberal political fundraisers they hosted over the years.

"They are sort of the inner circle of the most active Democrats in Santa Cruz

DARLING HOUSE

What: Retirement garden party and fundraiser.

When: 3-6 p.m., Saturday. House tours at 4 and 5 p.m.

Where: 315 West Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz.

For sale: Bedroom suites, antiques, artwork, baby grand piano, etc.

Tickets: 'Pay-it-forward donation' at the door.

RSVP: 831-458-1958 or kdarling1940@yahoo.com.

County, I think that's safe to say," Rotkin said. "They're really warm, friendly, outgoing types of people. They have a lot of friends — it's not just all political activism."