

# Arts center given ownership of building



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Mountain Arts Center in Ben Lomond is celebrating its seventh anniversary and ownership of the building that houses the center.

## Benefactors are local property owners

By JONDI GUMZ  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Founders of the Santa Cruz Mountain Arts Center have another reason to celebrate this year.

Not only is the organization marking its seventh anniversary this year, it now owns the building it has rented in the center of town since 1997. Local residents Jim and Barbara Thomas decided to give them the building in a deal that closed Dec. 31.

"We're very blessed," said Linda Levy, one of the 11 board members who run the place. "It's a good deed to start the new year."

Artists and art lovers are invited to celebrate the news Jan. 23 when the arts center hosts its annual member-

ship meeting.

"It will be a party because we're now 7 years old," Levy said.

She credited board member Anne Whelan and board chairwoman Julie Errecca with handling the permit paperwork and all the details needed to complete the transaction.

The building at 9341 Mill St., built in 1939, has three gallery rooms, a gift shop, office and space for classes. It's valued at just under a half-million dollars.

Both Jim and Barbara Thomas value the arts. Jim plays the ukulele and Barbara is an artist who is learning to play the harp.

When they moved to Ben Lomond in 1987, they wanted to create a community center for the Valley. So Jim, a retired real estate appraiser who enjoys surfing, and Barbara, who is also a writer, bought the building and opened a coffeehouse called The Gathering Place.

"It was successful in building up the community but it didn't make any money," Jim said.

He was leasing the building at cost when his wife learned that the Highlands Park Senior Center was raising the rental rates for her life drawing class.

They decided to offer the building for the drawing classes and the Santa Cruz Mountain Arts Center was born.

They had considered bequeathing the property to the arts center but decided not to wait.

"They can do a lot more once they own the building," said Jim Thomas. "It's easier to get grants."

His wife added, "It's my hope other people will support the creative effort going on there."

The gift comes at an opportune time. "Support for the arts has been hit hard," Levy said, citing cuts in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council and school arts classes.

"We're trying to fulfill needs for all sorts of people who want to experience art, so we offer a lot of classes, exhibitions and events," she said.

About 250 people are members, paying annual dues of \$40 a year.

The arts center operates on a budget of \$72,000 a year with mostly volunteer help.

"We have one part-time office person, who donates half her time because we pay her so little," Levy said.

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## Santa Cruz Mountains Arts Center

9341 Mill St., Ben Lomond.

### EVENTS

Guest exhibit, 'Nursing Mothers,' through Jan. 17, with three talks on birth topics Jan. 10-11 and Jan. 17.

Boulder Creek Acoustic Music Society, 7-9 tonight.

Poetry Night: 7:30-10 p.m. Jan. 16.

Annual membership meeting, 6 p.m. Jan. 23.

Reception for 'Balance Counterbalance,' conceptual exhibit juried by Laurie Rooke, 6-8 p.m. Jan. 23.

Two after-school art classes, starting Feb. 2, drawing, watercolor, printmaking and wire sculpture and assemblage. Cost per class: \$175.

### INFORMATION

Call 336-3513. Web site: [www.mountainartcenter.org](http://www.mountainartcenter.org).