

Pacific Ave

# Plotting a People-Proof Mall

by Rick Hildreth

THE Pacific Garden Mall's greenery must be people-proof, said Ken Hockenbery, 35, the city gardener who has tinkered with enough mixtures of plants, trees, shrubs and mall visitors to know what combo works best.

It's been an exercise in Darwinian fitness — the less fit plants have been baked to death by the sun, crowded out by selfish root systems, trodden into the peat or picked for their long-stemmed aesthetics.

Hence the mall's busy collections of marigolds, impatiens and fairy primroses which Hockenbery has come to favor since 1979 when he first used specimens of contrasting bloom to create floral patterns.

The beauty of these arrangements, however, was short-lived. Hockenbery soon tired of having key sections destroyed by the heavy-footed or light-fingered.

That's why he now people-proofs his sidewalk gardens by planting solid blocks of color in small hexagons. "Plant big, beautiful flowers and you're asking for trouble," he said.

Hockenbery, who has had his hands in the dirt for years, doesn't leave his trade when he goes home after work.

"Sometimes I bring guests to the mall on the weekend, and I still find myself going around picking up trash," he said as he pinched off a brown stem from a pink flourish of spiky-petaled plant.

But Hockenbery sees more than stems and litter when he works on the mall. His years there have enabled him to view it as a whole which begins as a street and ends almost as a park.

"The first block after Cathcart Avenue has more parking, it's wider, its plantings are more regular and closer to what you'd find on a traditionally landscaped street," he said.

The middle section is lined by plantings in irregular, organic patterns; there are more seating and gathering areas and fewer parking spaces. The road narrows and becomes more incidental to the bulbs, buds and bushes along its edge.

The advantages of working in this natural environment aren't lost on Hockenbery. Strolling strangers stop to talk. Friends tell him he's lucky.

Three others share his good fortune. Unlike Hockenbery, who supervises them, they aren't permanently assigned to the mall — a "class A park" according to the city — but rotate to other city grounds.

For the past few months it's been Frank Thomas in his "I'm proud to be an American" cap; Edmond Sheldon in his red suspenders; and blond Bill Slack, the crew's youngest member.

They with Hockenbery prune the 50-plus tree varieties, "do the little snip-snip stuff" on countless shrubs, replace 900 or so flowering annuals three times a year, repair sidewalks, remove litter, water, sweep and rake.



## The Keeping of the Mall

**M**OST Pacific Garden Mall merchants are satisfied with its effectiveness as a retail center but some complain about lack of parking, dirty sidewalks and inadequate street lighting.

"The mall is the best retail location in Santa Cruz county. Unfortunately many locals simply don't come down here. When I moved here from

Capitola, several of my customers told me they wouldn't," said Robert Severino, of Robert's Leathers.

He'd like to see a greater sense of "neighborhood" at the mall. "Once, people used to hang around here after dark and listen to the music in front of the Cooper House. Now they go home as soon as the shops are closed. It seems as if Capitola Village has gotten all of the evening entertainment sewn up. Providing more light-

ing down here is important," he said.

"I think it could be a little bit cleaner. If they kept the sidewalks as clean as they do at the Metro Center, it would be nice," said Mike Pieczarka, manager of Clark's Cyclery.

The mall's sidewalks are a sore spot for many merchants.

"The sidewalks are very dirty. Not to mention the paint and interesting slogans that appear on them so often," said Mick Rainbow, manager

of Rainbow Records.

Joe Williams, owner of Dell Williams Jewelry, "would like to see the tile cleaned up, they could steam clean it on a more regular basis." Rainbow added "the bricks really show up the dirt."

"The sidewalks get very dirty, from all the droppings from the trees," said Severino.

"There's an accumulation of litter by the middle of the day. It might be nice to have a mid-day or afternoon cleanup done. I'm not complaining, though, I think they're doing a fine job of keeping it clean and nice-looking," said Colleen Crosby, owner of the Santa Cruz Roasting Co.

Plaza Books has been on Pacific Avenue for 22 years, longer than the Mall. "It's an excellent place to do business," said owner Hal Morris. Like most of the mall merchants, he cleans his own storefront. "I engage a service to tidy up in front of our building, our area always looks halfway decent," he said.

"It would be nice if they would do the street sweeping earlier in the morning, so they wouldn't have to zip around cars the way they do now," said Jack Ghielemetti, owner of the Sportsman's Shop.

Inadequate parking facilities irritate many merchants.

"Some kind of permit parking for people who work at the mall would be nice. Our shop is assessed an employee parking fee, but we get no benefit from it. Rather than have someone pay the occasional parking ticket because he wasn't able to move his car within two hours, why not give

## Cleaner sidewalks mean more customers

**P**EOPLE are Pacific Garden Mall's biggest maintenance problem, said the city's park superintendent, who wants an awareness program that would increase concern for public amenities.

"We need a person out there selling park etiquette. Vandalism and serious damage are not the problem. People are just messy. They don't respect the nice things they have," said Rudy Quintanar.

The mall's gardens bear the brunt of this carelessness. "People walk right through the plantings, crushing them and snapping the branches off," Quintanar said.

It is not, however, a problem peculiar to the mall. "We've had the same problems along West Cliff Drive and East Cliff Drive as well as at many of our public amenities," he said.

Quintanar believes there is no public awareness program "because, at budget time, it becomes a small item and is deleted in favor of supplies."

The annual cost of mall maintenance

is \$100,000, and chews up some 10 to 15 percent of the parks and recreation budget. Plants, fertilizers, insecticides, soil and irrigation supplies account for \$20,000; the remaining \$80,000 is the payroll for four full-time employees who work from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Trash is another problem caused by people, said Quintanar.

Some 15 cubic yards of trash are removed from the mall every month. While large quantities of trash are to be expected, Quintanar again believes the amount would be less if people were more aware.

"There's a lot of trash on the mall, but the real problem is that people just don't use the receptacles provided for it," he said.

In the years since the mall was constructed, some merchants have complained that its red paving tile is slippery when wet. That has meant added work for those who maintain the mall.

"The tile is worn and slick in some spots and can be slippery. We try to

scuff it up and roughen the surface to avoid that, but it is difficult because the tile is very hard," he said.

The department still is using tile from the original construction of the mall, but Quintanar admitted the supply is running low and new tile must be purchased soon.

"We would like to replace it with something similar, but we want something with a different texture to avoid the problems we have now," he said.

Quintanar, who has been the superintendent of parks and recreation for seven years, believes public awareness, important now, will become increasingly so in the future.

"My experience indicates the situation grows progressively worse with a growth in population. The mall is a refreshing thing to have downtown. Some take it for granted, but once in a while one of those who doesn't will let you know how much he appreciates it and that makes all the work and expense worth it," he said.

— John Robert Moody

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him the option to pay for a permit?" asked Piczaraka.

"Maybe they could stop giving us tickets when we're unloading in the loading zone on Front Street," said Judy Crow, co-owner of Flowers by Judy and Jean. "More parking spaces would be nice."

Mall merchants are sanguine about hopes for improvements. "Of course, any improvements would have to be paid for by a new property assessment fee on the merchants here," Piczaraka said.

"We pay so much for mall taxes and promotional fees now that I'm not prepared to pay any more," said Crow.

"We pay \$400 a year in mall tax, \$300 for parking tax, and \$600 for property taxes, and we'd like to see more of that come back to us," said Ghielmetti.

"If you're going to ask the city to do it, it costs them money, and they have many other places where they can spend it. I'm not qualified to make that decision for them," said Morris.

Although it may not be perfect, most Pacific Garden Mall merchants share a sense of pride. "We've lived here for 12 years and the mall represents a community feeling, as opposed to the giant, industrial-strength shopping complexes," said Neal Coonerty, owner of Bookshop Santa Cruz.

"It's really a nice place to be. The trees really are amazing things," said Rainbow.

Coonerty also is pleased by the flora of the mall, although he'd "like to see some more annuals and more colorful flowers planted. It's nice but a little monotone in character out there. Parks and Rec and the people who work on the mall are doing a pretty good job, but they tend to favor low-maintenance plants, which aren't as attractive."

Williams agreed. "They could put some more colorful plants in," he said.

The historic quality of the mall appeals to the merchants. "It grew up with the town. It's been the commercial center of Santa Cruz for over a century, and it displays our architectural history," said Coonerty.

The mall "gives people the same kind of good feeling they get at places such as Disneyland, though not quite as candy-coated," he added.

"More than a shopping district, the mall is surrounded by neighborhoods, which provide much of the pedestrian traffic. The post office, city hall, the county building, are all in the area, it's the center of the town," Coonerty said.

"There's a much nicer atmosphere here than there is at 41st Avenue," said Rainbow. "It's the centerpiece of community feeling. It has a nice, homey, old small-town feeling," said Crosby.

— Rick Hildreth