

This house needs a home



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

George Mortan will give away this Pajaro Valley farmhouse; moving costs would be about \$24,000, however.

\$200 for a piece of Watsonville history

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For sale: 3,000-square-foot, Victorian house. Needs work, but price can't be beat: \$200.

WATSONVILLE — Actually, George Mortan is willing to give up the 118-year-old Thurwachter ranch house on Beach Road for free.

Mortan, who restores old houses for a living, bought the house for \$1 and figures he's put about \$200 into it. He had planned to move the house to a lot adjacent his Aromas home and restore it there. However, another restoration project is taking up his time.

"Plus, my neighbors might tar and feather me if I moved the house next door and let it sit for the two or three years it would take me to restore it," he said, laughing. "The real reason I got it was, basically, I wanted to save

it."

A self-admitted lover of old houses, Mortan sees restoration as a form of recycling.

"Recycling goes way beyond saving aluminum cans," he said. "If a person can recycle this house, they would have done enough recycling for 1,000 people for a lifetime."

The two-story, white and green-shuttered Thurwachter house sits off Beach Road, halfway between Highway 1 and Pajaro Dunes. Built in 1872 by farmer Frederick Thurwachter, it was the centerpiece of the 133-acre farm.

The house was well known from 1929 until 1963 for its landmark Monterey cypress trees, which were trimmed into forms and names. In 1929, an airplane and star were formed in honor of Charles Lindbergh, who had just conquered the Atlantic alone by

air.

In recent years, the house had fallen on hard times, abandoned by its former owner, Tom Mine. Mine was only too glad to get the rundown house off his hands so long as the new owner moved it from what is still a working farm, according to Mortan.

Mortan said estimates show that moving the house would cost about \$24,000. Depending on how far it would have to be transported, the house would have to be separated into two or three sections and loaded onto trucks.

Yet, Mortan said the new owner would be getting a bargain.

"We're talking about 3,000 square feet of old-growth redwood — wood that you can't even get anymore."

At \$24,000 to move, that comes to \$8 a square foot, which is much lower than the \$60-a-

square-foot price of even modest construction in the area today, he said.

Of course, restoration could cost another \$100,000. Mortan said the house is structurally sound, having made it through the October earthquake in fine shape.

"If there's anybody out there who thinks in terms of their children, their children's children and their children, this would be it," Mortan said. "You shouldn't waste a building like this.

"To me, not saving it would be like leaving Grandma on the street."

Interested persons may contact Mortan at 726-1820 or 726-3332. People are welcome to drive by the house at 2083 Beach Road, but should not drive onto the grounds without Mortan since there is a caretaker there.