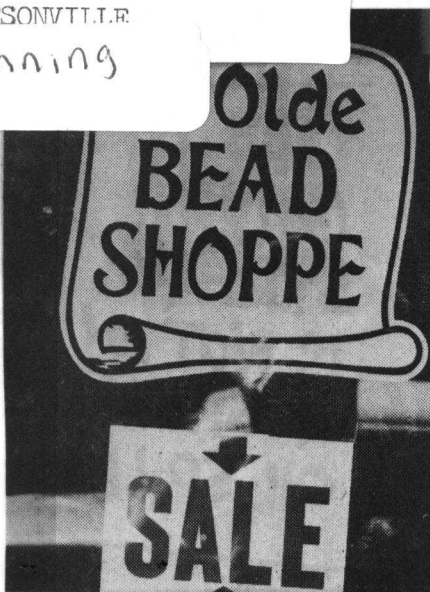


1976 -
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Changing face of Main St.



By KEN McLAUGHLIN

Within the last year or so, a new breed of store with a new breed of owner has been burgeoning along Main St. The shops sell things such as water pipes, beads, exotic herbs and waterbeds—items seemingly out-of-place in a small farming community. "I guess you could call it a kind of hippie strip," says the hirsute owner of Books For Everyone, Mike Kostyal, referring to the cluster of new stores along the east side of the 400 Block.

To some local residents, the stores represent a Santa Cruzification of Watsonville that can only produce unwholesome things. To others, the stores depict a source of vitality in a sometimes drab and moribund retail center. Whatever one's opinion, it can't be denied that the new stores have brought fresh faces to downtown merchant meetings, as well as a changing face to Main Street.

"When I first opened the store, people used to pass by and stare at all the long hair in the window," muses Kostyal. "But now they just come in."

A zealous environmentalist concerned with recycling everything, from soda bottles to buildings, Kostyal is proud that the strip has given part of Main St. a new life. "Four

years ago, all these stores were vacant," he points out. "It looked like skid row down here with two or three winos hanging out most of the time."

The new stores might cater to a new kind of clientele, but their wares also interest the older folks. "We get everyone from grandpas to young kids," maintains Della Souza, who helps her daughter Debbie run Ye Olde Bead Shoppe.

Linda Brooke, owner of the newest store, Food of the Earth, says she has turned on more than a few skeptics to her organic and vegetarian cuisine. "I have quite a few people in their sixties come in here who just enjoy eating some real food for a change," she says.

Linda often gets comments from out-of-town visitors not expecting to find an organic food restaurant in Watsonville. "Recently some people stopped by on their way from Big Sur and they were amazed," she remarks. "They never knew we had things like this here."

Not part of the strip, but one of the older alternative shops is the Monterey Bay Co. Owned by Mark and Mary Jo Frederickson, the store sells imported clothing, oriental rugs and a large selection of coral, silver and turquoise jewelry.

"We're attracting more and more people over 35," says Mark. "This type of shop is becoming more and more popular with the older crowd."

Like all the new merchants, Frederickson wishes downtown revitalization would move faster. "I think some kind of mall would bring people to Watsonville instead of sending them to Santa Cruz," he maintains. "I depend on walking traffic."

Chamber of Commerce manager Gil Mello says at Central Business Improvement (CBID) get-togethers, the new proprietors are usually more vocal than the rest, but that most of the older merchants welcome them. "I don't see any difference other than the fact that they're young," he says.

Only Kostyal and Jay Schwartz, owner of the waterbed store Comfort Kingdom, have joined the chamber. But Mello didn't really expect many of the younger merchants to sign up. "We don't put pressure on them," Mello says. "We're kind of soft-sell around here."

"They're really nice people," Kostyal says of the chamber staff and members.

Continued on page 9

MONTEREY BAY COMPANY

COMFORT KINGDOM

PLAZA 400

REFERENCE

A Santa Cruzification?

Main St.—a new personality

Continued from page 1

"But their effect is limited. It's more of a social club."

Kostyal doesn't feel he'll renew when this year's membership expires. None of the merchants, however, sees any looming split between young and old merchants as has occurred in Santa Cruz.

But the differences are there. Debbie Souza, who's been working to organize a crafts fair in the plaza, feels she's "sort of been given the run around" from local powers. "We have our own ideas and we're running into a wall," she laments. "I've almost given up."

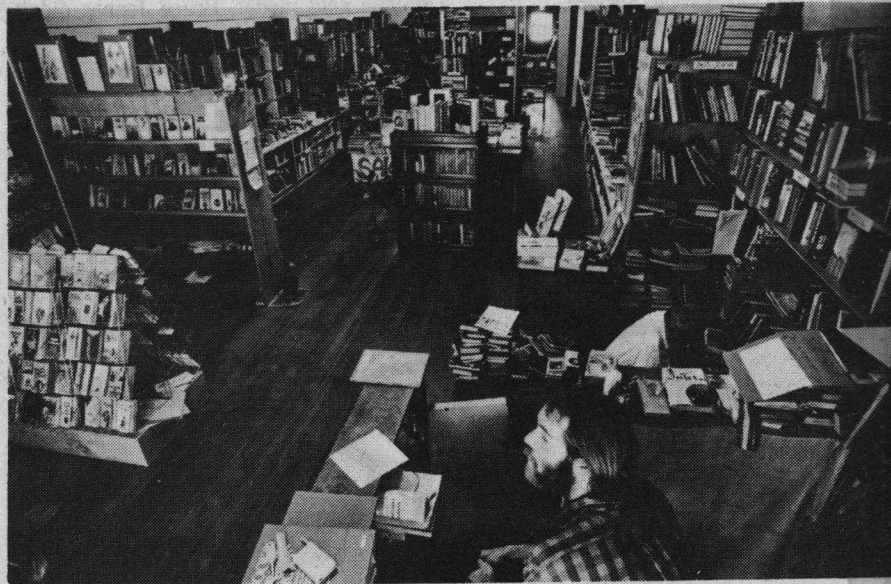
Schwartz thinks the new shops have different advertising needs. When the CBID allocates money for general promotion, he says, the new merchants often feel left out. "We'd rather advertise on (rock radio) stations like KDON and KBEZ," says Schwartz. "The old timers don't like the idea."

Despite the gripes, all of the merchants seem happy where they are; all feel a market exists for their goods. Schwartz estimates 90 per cent of his customers are from Watsonville and Corralitos. "The Pajaro Valley has done me quite well," he says, admitting that he has had his doubts whether a waterbed store could survive on Main St. Although none of the new owners claims a smashing success, all feel they will last.

Mello hopes they will. The stores, he feels, have brought new variety, which can only help the downtown. He points to the Monterey Bay Company, which along with Plaza 400, has provided a "new kind of gift shop that we've never had before."

Besides for providing newness, the merchants, as a united group dedicated to revitalization, could serve as a catalyst to put the sprucing-up of the downtown into motion.

"We've got something here, and I don't want to lose it," says Frederickson about the latent beauty of the downtown. "And I think someday it'll all come together."



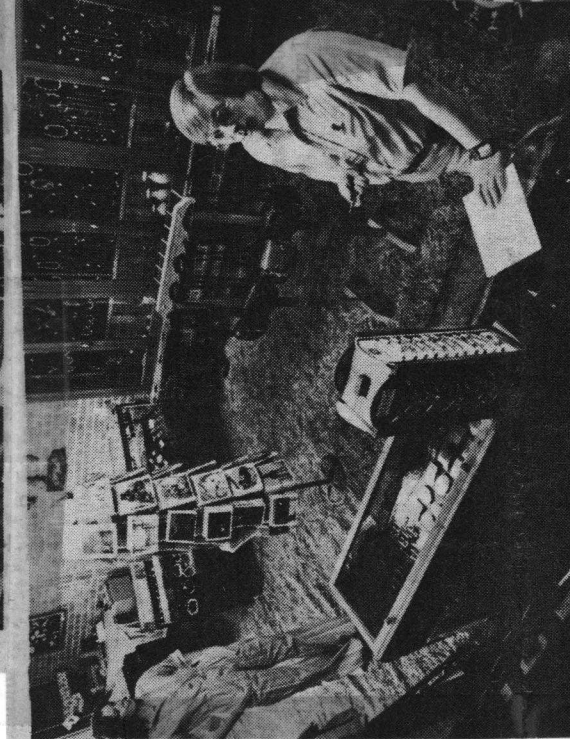
Books for Everyone (Mike Kostyal, foreground)



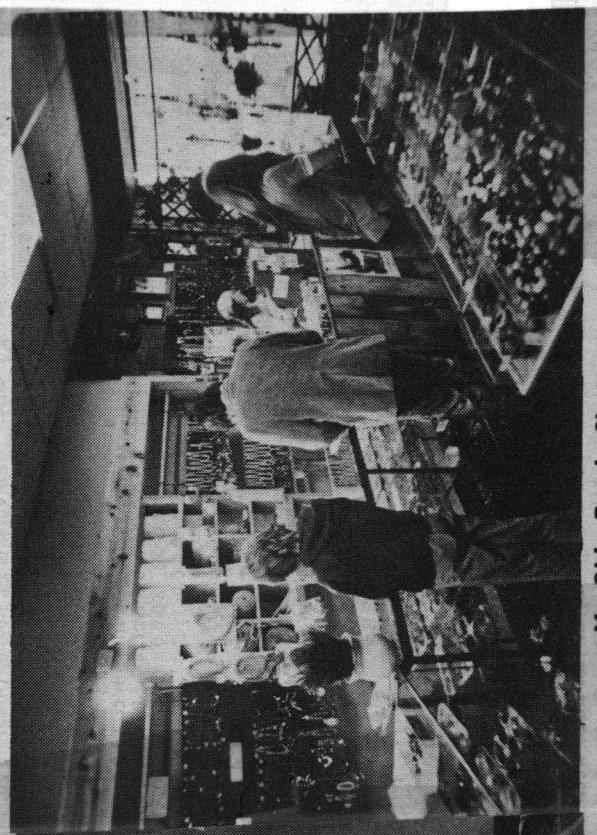
Several shops occupy Plaza 400



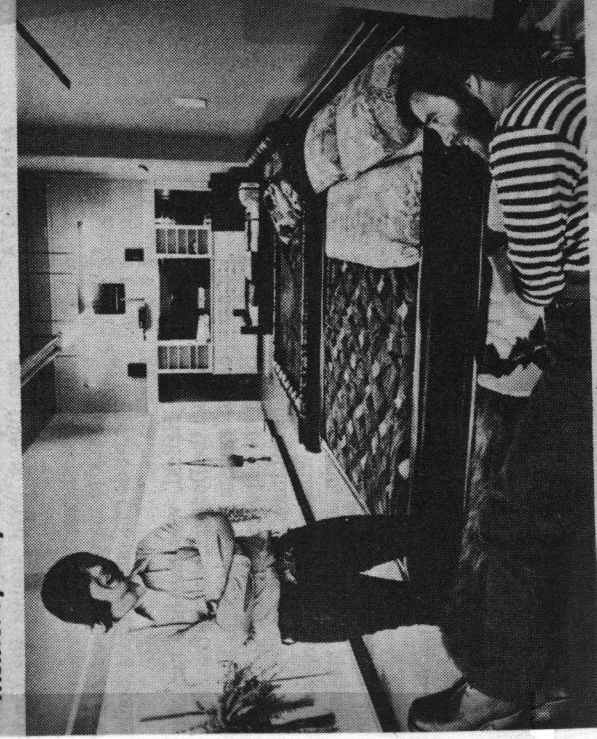
Food of the Earth (that's Linda Brooke)



Monterey Bay Co. (Mark and Mary Jo Frederickson)



Ye Olde Beade Shoppe



Comfort Kingdom (Jay Schwartz, top)