

✓ Wrigley plant to close April 30

By DONALD MILLER

Sentinel business editor

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SANTA CRUZ — The end is in close sight for the Wm. Wrigley Co. plant.

The company has set April 30 as the date when it will close its Mission Street chewing gum plant for good.

Wrigley announced last April the plant was going to close by June. The latest announcement only moves up that date by a month or so.

Wrigley also said that 186 employees will lose their jobs, beginning March 17 and continuing through March 27. A small number of employees will be required to close the plant after it shuts down, and will continue working through April, the company said.

Wrigley employed 311 people last April, when the closing announcement was made.

At that time, Wrigley, the world's largest chewing gum maker, said it had become too expensive to make gum on the West Coast. Wrigley has been shipping raw materials in from the East Coast, then shipping the packaged gum back again.

The Santa Cruz plant was opened in 1955.

Wrigley was the first nationally known firm to locate in Santa Cruz. Chewing gum made here carried a label "Made in Santa Cruz," that became a source of pride for civic leaders in the late 1950s and 1960s.

But the 385,000-square-foot plant has been running only at about 60 percent of capacity in recent years. In May 1995, Wrigley laid off 10 employees, the first layoffs in the company's history.

Employees who found out last April their plant was going to close were told layoffs would begin last summer to pare down the remaining work force. About half the employees were eligible to transfer to available jobs at other Wrigley plants in Chicago or Gainesville, Ga. Those who opted not to relocate were being offered early retirement packages.

Wrigley put the building up for sale after announcing the closing.