

Big downtown store falls

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SANTA CRUZ — Gottschalk's department store is the latest to fall victim to demolition in downtown Santa Cruz.

The 80,000-square-foot former Leask's store began to come down Monday. Some parts of the building, which originally was a series of buildings connected together including an old city firehouse, date back to the 1880s.

Granite Construction foreman Chuck Knowlton, watching the work around 1:30 p.m. Monday, said about 20 percent of the building was already down. "This puppy should be on the ground by Wednesday noon at the latest," he said, although hauling the rubble away is expected to take until early next week.

Santa Cruz City Planner Charlie Eadie said pedestrian access from Church to Front streets — through a portion of Pacific Avenue — is hoped for by the end of next week. City crews will have to repave some areas once the demolition is completed.

Knowlton, who heads the demolition crew of 17, just returned from Alaska where he worked 197 straight days on clean-up of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. "This is a piece of cake compared to that," he said.

However, crews have run into some unanticipated problems with the numerous steel beams that were holding the Gottschalk's building up. Knowlton said there were more steel beams than they thought.

Gottschalk's Chairman Joe Levy has already said the company hopes to rebuild at the same Pacific Avenue-Church Street location, although low-interest, long-term financing needs to be arranged.

The Fresno-based retailer bought the store in September 1988. It is going ahead with a \$5-million, 98,120-square-foot store at Capitola Mall, expected to open next summer.



Gov. George Deukmejian and Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt walk by demolished Gottschalk's.

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