



SHMUEL THALER/SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Dorothy Lieberman, right, regales Kelly Dillon with anecdotes from her years owning Marianne's Ice Cream.

SANTA CRUZ

Sweet landmark is sold

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By Jondi Gumz
Santa Cruz Sentinel

SANTA CRUZ—Here's the scoop: Marianne's Ice Cream is changing hands.

Sam Lieberman, 83, who bought the business in 1958 and has run it with his wife, Dorothy, will turn over the operation to Charlie Wilcox, 46, and his partner, Kelly Dillon, who live in Capitola.

A Santa Cruz landmark in a bright red building at 1020 Ocean St., Marianne's is a favorite of tourists and locals alike. It was on the market for \$1.4 million.

Neither buyer nor seller wanted to disclose the sale price, but Wilcox said, "It's worth every penny."

The Liebermans have turned away offers with a

polite "We'll think about it," as Dorothy put it, waiting for the right people to come along.

Wilcox and Dillon fit the bill.

They are newcomers to Santa Cruz, having met while working at Citibank and then spending more than a decade in what they call "socially responsible banking."

They started a nonprofit in Bronx, N.Y., offering financial and tax preparation services. The couple raised \$17 million to open a community bank as an alternative to pricey check-cashing services. It took five years, opening in 2007.

Two years ago, Dillon was recruited to become

chief financial officer at Santa Cruz Community Credit Union. Wilcox said he had the good fortune to follow her.

Their first visit to Marianne's together was in February or March. "It was a Saturday night and it was packed," recalled Wilcox.

He had the 50-50 vanilla and orange sherbet and immediately became a fan. The next morning, while Googling for homes for sale, he came upon the listing for Marianne's. He said it struck a chord, explaining, "My first job was on a dairy farm."

A face-to-face meeting with the Liebermans took place in April.

"Sam and Dorothy were

very careful," Wilcox said. "I love that aspect."

Marianne's, which serves 75 flavors daily, has held its own despite The Penny Ice Creamery, Mission Hill Creamery and Kelly's French Bakery ice cream opening in the past two years.

Customers are half retail and half wholesale, with Marianne's served at 223 restaurants and about 75 events such as the Gilroy Garlic Festival, where garlic ice cream is popular. Some of the production staff have been on the job 15 years.

Will anything change under the new owners?

Wilcox answered, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."