

mall

Community Action Renewing a City

A Private Redevelopment Plan in Santa Cruz

A DO-IT-YOURSELF redevelopment program is working wonders in downtown Santa Cruz.

A tree-studded garden mall has turned the city's once-drab business center into a place of beauty. Nondescript store fronts are gradually being re-shaped and the former clutter of signs has vanished.

Adjacent to the downtown area, a program is underway to restore to elegance many of the fine old Victorian homes.

And local residents and businessmen are financing all this without Federal aid.

The initiators of this civic pick-me-up are Chuck Abbott, a 78-year-old photographer, and his wife Esther.

It all began back in 1965 when the Abbotts grew concerned about the deteriorating downtown area. They proposed a program called "Project Foresight" and made color slide presentations to civic groups illustrating what other cities had done to renovate business districts. In each case, the development of a mall and store front renovation were major elements of the revitalized cities.

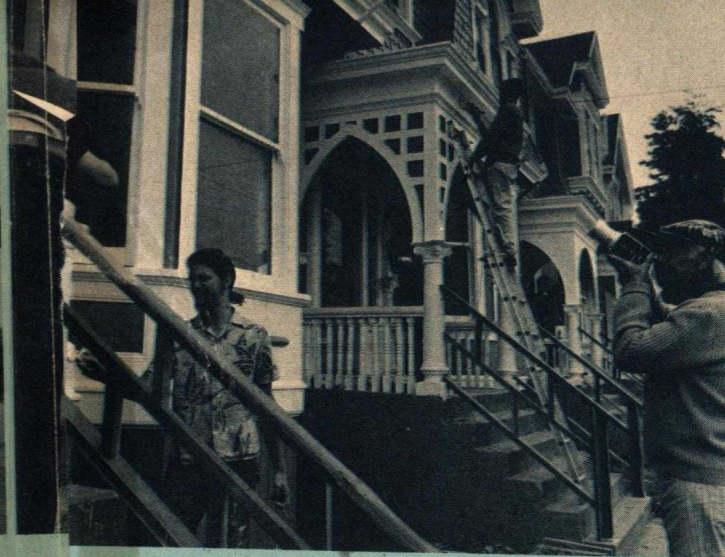
Gathering more slides and more information on their cross-country trips, the Abbotts drummed up community enthusiasm. He and a group of merchants put up



CHUCK ABBOTT strolls in the downtown mall which he initiated as part of a "self-help" renewal project in Santa Cruz. "PG&E's Congress for Community Progress program was a great assist in helping me focus on the need for civic improvements," he says.

\$2,200 for a feasibility study, plans were drawn and 70 per cent of the downtown property owners signed a petition to tax themselves for the mall. A district was formed, the city council approved the plans and construction began in July 1969.

BUT EVEN as the project was taking shape, Abbott was moving on to other things. He formed a group called Community Associates to improve the sometimes strained relations between college students and city residents. The result: a spring fair sponsored by students



"PROD" — Private Redevelopment of Downtown — has been launched by Chuck Abbott to demonstrate ways of sprucing up the aging residences that border downtown. College students are helping to turn this old structure into profitable, low-rent apartments as an example for others.

and businessmen. Featuring an environmental theme, it was held earlier this year in the newly-completed garden all.

Now Abbott has launched an appropriately-named project called PROD. It stands for Private Rehabilitation of Downtown, and is a combination of urban renewal and the Job Corps—all privately financed. Abbott has purchased five apartments and an old house and has had college students refurbish the aging structures. He rents these restored Victorians to students at rents lower than what they must pay for some tenement quarters.

"I want to demonstrate to other landlords and to financial institutions that on this self-help basis we can restore these old dwellings and do it profitably," says Abbott. "At the same time we can teach building skills to the unskilled, provide low-rent housing for those who need it and upgrade the appearance of our city so that it will attract new businesses and new investments."

ABBOTT, with the tacit approval of union officials, plans to use retired skilled craftsmen to supervise the trainees. Only dilapidated housing will qualify for on-the-job Training Corps service and only those homes owned by people who cannot afford to repair them—or those who agree to rent them at low rents and not sell them at a profit—will be restored.

"This is not too different from some programs offered by the federal government," Abbott notes. "But it takes three years to set up a federal program. I want to do it tomorrow."

If his past successes are any indication, tomorrow it will be done. Meanwhile, his reputation as a miracle worker has gotten him another assignment. County supervisors asked Abbott to devise some plan for saving the old and abandoned county courthouse, which is otherwise destined to be replaced by a parking lot.

"Santa Cruz has an unequalled opportunity to develop into the West Coast's most desirable place in which to enjoy smog-free living," Abbott declares. "We have the revitalized Redevelopment Area that houses the government center and big new commercial buildings, U.C.-Santa Cruz, a yacht harbor and now our new mall. With our beaches and tourist attractions, this has the finest potential of any coastal community."

"All we need," he added, "is a prod."

And that Abbott is furnishing—in capital letters.