

Flea market vendors fear closure of 'cultural icon'



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

The Skyview Drive-In flea market may have to leave in a matter of weeks, but the potential new owners say that's unlikely.

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Potential buyer says tradition
✓ **will carry on for at least 2 years**

By **GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER**
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SANTA CRUZ — Vendors who for years have pawned high chairs, stone necklaces and old videos, among numerous other wares, at the Skyview Drive-In flea market are concerned that a weekend tradition since 1971 will soon come to a close.

Vendors who have tried to reserve their selling spots at the flea market through the end of the

year have been denied, and petitions are being passed to preserve what some are calling "a cultural icon."

But those fears are only partially justified.

Attorney John P. Christian with Tobin & Tobin in San Francisco, who represents the drive-in owners, the Martins family, confirmed that vendors have been told they could count on selling their stock

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Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center has plans to expand into their neighboring property, the Skyview Drive-In, which they are in escrow to buy.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A vendor eyes a potential buyer at the Skyview Drive-In flea market Friday.

Flea market

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on the Soquel Drive lot through the end of November.

"Beyond that, I don't know," Christian said.

But officials for Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center on Friday said sellers have no reason to fear; the health care provider stands by the group's statement earlier this year that the flea market — considered by many a community staple — would remain open for a couple more years, despite the pending sale.

"We realize that [the flea market] is something that is important in the community, and we want to explore any option we can to make sure that continues to be available," said Sutter spokesman Ben Drew.

He did not, however, commit to continue running the drive-in movie theater.

Sutter is in escrow to buy the 14.3-acre drive-in property from the Martins family, who have owned the land for generations. The property sits next to Sutter's 30-bed hospital on Soquel Drive, which is across Chanticleer Avenue from a number of Sutter-affiliated doctors' offices.

Neither side would comment on the selling price or when escrow might close. Drew said Sutter ultimately would like to expand its facilities and the number of physicians it has serving the county, and the drive-in site is an optimal place to do that.

However, county Planning Department head Tom Burns said Sutter has not yet come in to talk about long-term plans for the property — a typical step when buying a piece of land for commercial devel-

opment.

Even if the deal closes this fall, Burns said, it probably will be years before bulldozers break ground on a new medical facility.

"Obviously you're looking at creating a larger campus over time, and we need to talk about larger campus issues," Burns said.

Those would include a master plan addressing traffic and other neighborhood concerns, and involve public hearings and possibly an environmental review.

That should ease minds at the flea market, where on Friday morning snack bar worker Juan Camacho was gathering signatures in support of keeping the flea market open past November, just in case. By 11 a.m. he had 80 autographs on his list.

One vendor he solicited for a signature was Las Lomas resident Maria Zaragoza, who said she and her husband have made their living since 1996 growing 50 to 60 different type of plants to sell at the flea market every weekend. Potted poppies, pepper plants and gerber daisies stretched in rows before her, as customers filed through searching for the perfect additions to their gardens.

If the drive-in flea market closes, she said, it would mean spending more gas and time traveling to another flea market, possibly in Pleasanton or Concord. If a flea market starts up on the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, she said, she might go there.

But it won't be the same.

"I have a lot of customers here. They like my plants," Zaragoza said. "It's sad. It's like our life has been passing by here, year after year."

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