

Apple Growers demolition begins



Photos by Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: Henningsen Construction workers use an excavator to demolish concrete walls at the Apple Growers Ice & Cold Storage building Monday. **BELOW:** An excavator chews up a section of wall that still features the old Apple Growers lettering.

Historic building damaged by 2011 fire to be razed

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — Apple Growers Ice & Cold Storage Co., which was severely damaged in a four-alarm fire last year, is being demolished and unless a buyer expresses interest in purchasing the remaining structures, the business will likely be completely razed, according to Mark Corley, project manager and consultant for Redenbacher & Corley Construction Services, the company in charge of the work.

Corley said the two central cold storage facilities, which were most damaged in the fire, are being razed first to give potential buyers a chance to purchase the remaining structures, which total 17,000 square feet and can still be used for storage.

But the entire business at 850 West Berach Street, which once comprised five structures, will likely be completely razed over the next two months, leaving behind a 3.5-acre parcel with an asking price of \$1.5 mil-

lion, Corley said.

Jerry, a former employee who would only give his first name, said he drove a forklift for the business for 18 years before he was laid off two months ago.

After the fire in April 2011 destroyed the middle portion of the building that was used as cold storage for apples and juice, much of the business was rendered largely inoperable, Jerry said.

The last usable building — just to the left of the cold storage rooms that burned — was used for six months to store onions as recently as last winter. After the onions were removed, however, the owners permanently closed the business, Jerry said.

"We got rid of them, and then they laid us off," he said. "Their plan is to shut it down."

On Thursday, workers were using a demolition excavator to tear down the remaining walls at the site.

Watsonville Building Official Mike Stone said the city issued



a demolition permit last week, and that with no plans in the works to redevelop the prop-

erty, it will likely sit vacant until

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian file

An aerial photograph shows the fire damage to the main building of Apple Growers Ice & Cold Storage Co. in April 2011.

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it is sold.

"They're going to raze the entire site," Stone said. "As far as I know they don't have any plans for the lot."

Inspectors say the April 20 blaze was accidental, sparked by a torch used the night before by a roofing company. The

78,000 square-foot building burned for three days, destroying \$2 million worth of merchandise, which was mainly apples and juice owned by S. Martinelli & Co.

After the fire was extinguished, a structural engineer determined that the walls surrounding the building were weakened by the fire and needed to be reinforced before anyone could enter.

Building Manager Stephanie Phillips said that all eight com-

pany employees were safely evacuated. No injuries were reported.

A subsequent insurance inspection of the building determined that the less damaged parts of the facility were unusable.

Built in 1928, the cold storage facility was used for years by local growers who paid a fee to hold products until they were ready to go to market or be shipped.