

Yellow Cab Co. gets full makeover — except for the color

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LIVE OAK — How did a musician and a computer technician become the owners of Santa Cruz Yellow Cab Co.?

In expensive Santa Cruz County, bass player James Monroe and high-tech worker Alex Danganan turned to driving taxis to pay bills or save money.

Now the two have gone from driving cabs to owning the cab company, though both men still drive cabs and have shown up at the office nearly every day since escrow on the deal closed two weeks ago.

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JAMES MONROE,
YELLOW CAB CO. CO-OWNER

the chance to do something, you've got to take the opportunity when it's presented to you," Monroe said, sitting in the driver's break room in the company's new offices off Soquel Avenue. "We bought the company

because we wanted to make sure everyone could continue to work, and as a public service, because we serve a lot of seniors and people with disabilities."

Monroe's cell phone rang as he was speaking to a reporter. It was an elderly woman in Scotts Valley calling to ask Monroe to pick up her medication and deliver it to her. He smiled as he spoke to the woman, nodded, and said he'd be there right away.

About 70 percent of their customers are regulars, said Monroe, including riders with Lift Line and the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Tran-

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Yellow Cab Co. drivers James Monroe, left, and Alex Danganan are now in the driver's seat at the company. The two have bought the cab company from longtime owner Jim Bosso, whose father Joe started it in 1948. The pair says they bought the company to not only make money, but serve the community.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Cab

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sit District.

There has been taxi service in Santa Cruz County since the 19th century, said Santa Cruz historian Ross Gibson, when individually-owned cabs called jitney cabs ferried tourists around town. Formal taxi service was established by the 1920s. Joe Bosso bought Santa Cruz Yellow Cab Co. in 1948. Two weeks ago, Monroe and Danganan bought it from Joe Bosso's son, Jim Bosso.

The pair got a nearly \$500,000 loan from Santa Cruz Community Credit Union, based on their homes' equity. After spending more than \$300,000 on the sale, Monroe and Danganan have used the rest of the loan for technology improvements, including new computers and dispatching software that includes a global positioning system.

The fleet has 25 cabs. Between five and 18 Yellow Cab drivers are on duty at any one time, depending on how busy it is.

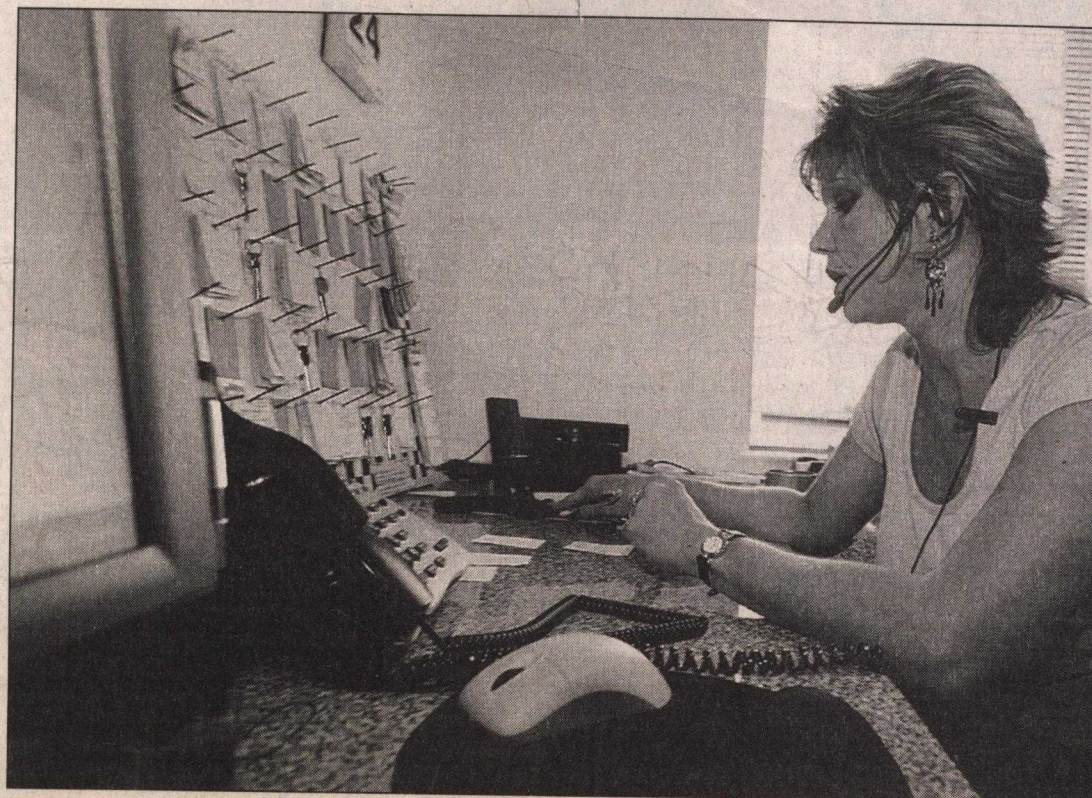
The new owners hope to turn the business around financially, which earlier this year issued payroll checks that did not clear, leading to a cabbie walkout.

Already, things have gotten better, employees said. Kelly Dunn, who has handled payroll at the company for years, said the new owners printed their first paychecks last week, and "I know they are going to clear. It's a great feeling."

When charting career paths, Monroe and Danganan didn't see themselves as cabbies or taxi company owners.

Monroe, 52, arrived in Santa Cruz in 1973 after being discharged from the Air Force. He took a job with the symphony. He started out playing guitar, but eventually found his place with the upright bass.

He joined a band that regularly played the old Cooper House and performed at clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area. But he eventually grew tired of the bar scene.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Dispatcher Robyn Brown fields cab calls at the Yellow Cab Co.'s new office in Live Oak along the Highway 1 frontage road.

By the late 1980s, he started driving for Yellow Cab part time to make some extra money to supplement his music career. After the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, he became a full-time cab driver.

Monroe said he's discovered a cabbie's hours fit his "patient and nonjudgemental" temperament. The late nights — he often works till 2 a.m. — are normal for him.

In 1995, Monroe was the first cabbie at Yellow Cab to become an owner-operator; he owned his cab and contracted with Bosso for dispatcher service. Soon, Monroe owned a half-dozen cabs and leased them to drivers.

So for him, taking over the cab company is just an expansion of the business he was already running.

For Danganan, 53, it was a bigger change. A technician at Plantronics for 21 years, Danganan

started driving a cab a few years ago, because, he said, "I have two kids and a mortgage."

"Because I live in Santa Cruz, I need to work extra," he said. His wife and Monroe's wife are friends, and through them Danganan got the idea to start driving a cab. He's saving money to put his daughters through college.

Danganan, the quieter of the two men, smiles constantly and busies himself with the technical aspects of the job. He's the company's plant manager, fixing the time clock machine and making things run.

He's also the more cautious of the two. Where Monroe talks about being grateful and thankful for the opportunity, Danganan says simply that he hopes things work out well.

Already, the two are getting high marks. Sam Storey is executive

director of Community Bridges, the agency that runs Lift Line and has contracted with Yellow Cab Co. before and after the ownership change to transport disabled people around the county.

After the cabbie walkout earlier this year, Storey suspended the company's contract. Last week, Storey said he's slowly adding more trips back to Yellow Cab's schedule.

"Jim seems to be interested not just in the business, but also in serving the community," Storey said. "That pleases me, because that's what our agency is about, too."