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Small Business
Pacific Coast Producers

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

As many as 600 were once employed at cannery on Barson Street during peak packing season.

Seabright cannery closing; will pack it in after 75 years

By DONALD MILLER
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SANTA CRUZ — After 75 years of canning and freezing fruits and vegetables, the city's only remaining cannery is closing its doors at the end of the year.

Pacific Coast Producers confirmed Monday that the Seabright-area cannery is shutting down at the end of the next packing season.

The cannery, which once employed as many as 600 persons in the peak packing season, expects to hire 300 people in late summer for its final production run of pears.

The company — a cooperative of growers who own processing plants throughout the state — has 20 full-time employees. Pacific Coast Producers says many of these employees will move to other company locations.

The seasonal employees probably will end up working in Pajaro Valley canneries, if food packers there are hiring, a company spokeswoman said.

Pacific Coast Producers is asking the city to consider rezoning the land from industrial to residential. That request is being considered by the city Planning Commission.

The company has hired Security Pacific Realty Advisory Services for help in deciding what to do with

the 5-acre site at 104 Barson St.

Linda T. Lower, senior vice president of Security Pacific, said that the food cooperative is considering whether to sell the property and what kind of development it is best suited for. The prevailing sentiment in Santa Cruz, she noted, is for housing, including affordable units.

In a prepared statement, Pacific Coast Producers President Larry D. Clay said the decision to close the cannery after 18 years of PCP ownership "was made with much careful consideration."

The cannery has a long history, one that reflects the Santa Cruz area's change from an agricultural to an urban area.

The cannery was started in 1914 and was known as the Santa Cruz Fruit and Olive Canning Co., according to Sentinel files. Apples, olives and string beans were the main products canned. In 1921, the company was reorganized and the apple and olive canning was discontinued. The new company, Santa Cruz Fruit Packing Co., began packing a variety of fruits and vegetables, most locally grown.

By 1929 the plant was handling more than 6,000 tons of fruits and vegetables, including spinach, artichokes, cherries, apricots and

pears. By 1930, the cannery employed 175 people during the peak season. Santa Cruz-label fruits and vegetables were shipped around the U.S. and to Europe.

A decade later, it reported its peak work force had swelled to 400. It leased cold storage space at the Union Ice house on Chestnut Street.

The long-abandoned ice house has become an eyesore and firetrap in recent years, and the city has threatened to condemn the property in an effort to get the landlord to tear it down.

By 1940, the cannery had added a freezing plant, freezing mostly brussels sprouts.

The cannery's name changed during the next decade, to Stokely-Van Camp.

Stokely-Van Camp reported it was employing 600 people during the peak packing season in 1952.

In 1971, Stokely-Van Camp Inc. sold the cannery to Pacific Coast Producers, a newly organized cooperative of growers. At the time of the sale, Alfred J. Stokely, president of Stokely-Van Camp, said the cannery was sold because it was no longer profitable.

By the 1970s, the cannery was processing only beans and pears and later reduced that product line by half, with only pears remaining.

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