

# Happy days are here again in Boulder Creek

## Mountain community recovers from storms

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**BOULDER CREEK** — The temptation is to say that three years after storms devastated the San Lorenzo Valley, Boulder Creek has come back.

Except that some business owners and community leaders say it never went away.

Either way, one thing is for sure: in the up-and-down cycle of small town economies, Boulder Creek is definitely on the "up."

In doing so, Boulder Creek has surmounted the back-to-back storms of 1982 and 1983 (Friday marked the three-year-anniversary of the '82 flood) and a two-year recession which affected businesses nationwide.

Today, the shops are busy. The streets are clean. And the town just seems more ... *alive* than it has in years.

"It's kind of exciting, what's happening in Boulder Creek," says Boulder Creek Business Association secretary Mary Williams. "We're turning into a viable business community ... with almost every service someone would need."

"The town looks better than it has since the turn of the century," offers Realtor Tom Pimentel.

Adds businessman and Boulder Creek native Bob Locatelli, "Boulder Creek is going through a renaissance. It's getting

modernized, aestheticized."

Prosperity has come, at least for the moment, to this rural hamlet 14 miles north of Santa Cruz.

It's taken the form of rejuvenated store fronts, as opposed to new construction, in a town whose scenic hillsides and unstable soils provide automatic growth controls.

Locatelli's expanded Boulder Creek Pharmacy is one example.

Locatelli, who also owns a pharmacy in Felton, bought the building formerly leased by Sprouse-Reitz and spent thousands of dollars (he prefers not to give exact figures) in remodeling.

Some other signposts:

In the last year, 28 new businesses have opened, according to Susan Belanger, president of the Boulder Creek Business Association.

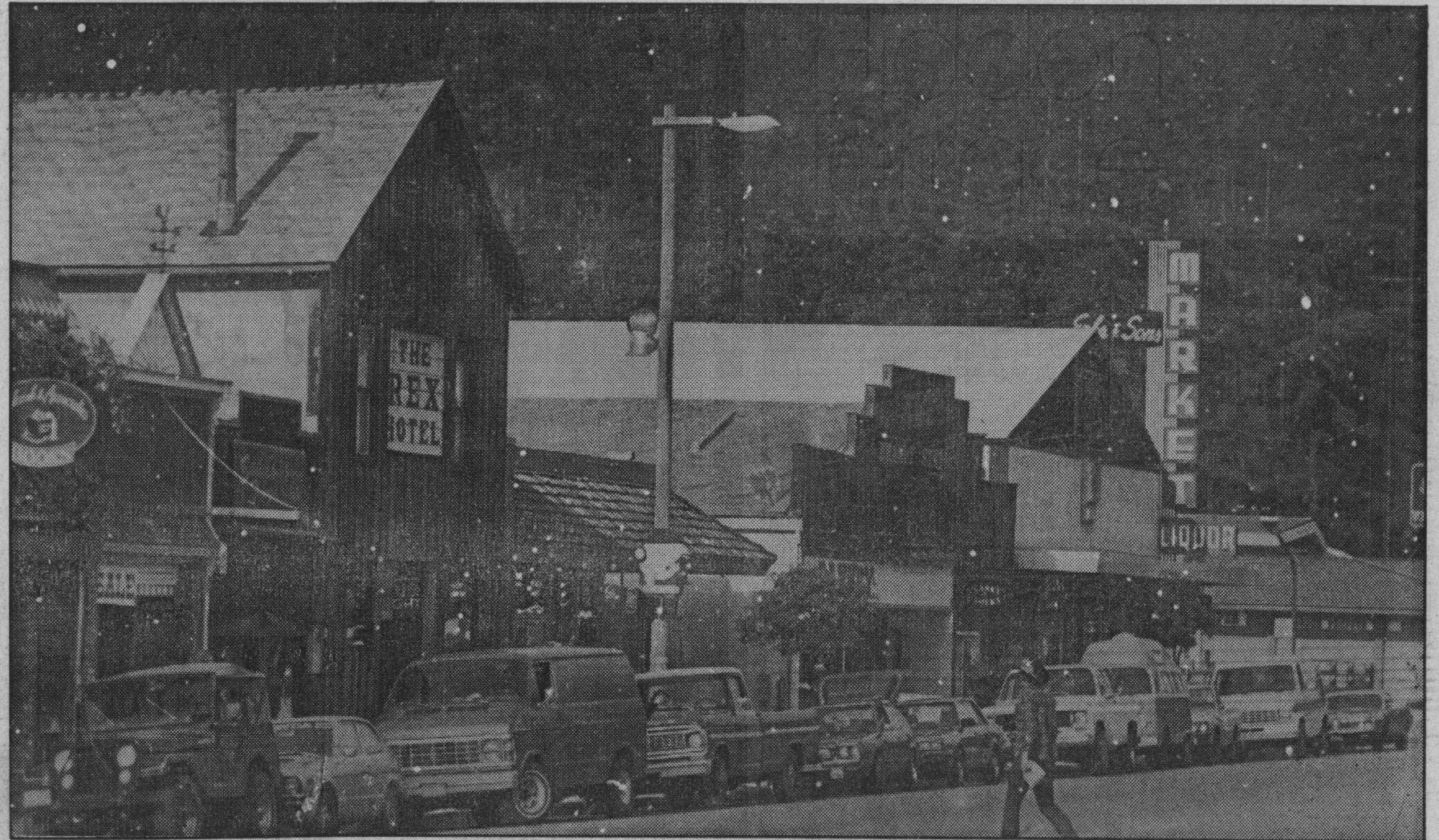
These have included a women's clothing store, a print shop, an art and frame store, and two video cassette rental stores. A new bookstore is in the works.

Numbers for previous years were not available, but Williams but said the increase in 1984 was substantial.

As a result only one or two vacant commercial properties remain in the three-block area making up downtown Boulder Creek.

Good properties have a waiting list says

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Business is booming in the mountain community of Boulder Creek.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



# Boulder Creek bounces back

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business association vice-president Bob Slawinski.

Johnny's and Erba's supermarkets both remodeled and expanded.

Johnny's added more than 3,000 square feet of retail space, almost doubling the store's size. Store owner Sam Lupo says he spent \$500,000 on remodeling the supermarket.

Likewise, the stores' sales volume has increased from \$3 million in 1983 to \$5 million in 1984, Lupo says.

Rumpelstiltskins clothing store, another longtime Valley business, almost tripled its floor space, says owner Jacquie Albright. Last year her sales volume has at least doubled.

Typical of the new businesses is True Nature Foods, a health-food store which is being operated in the old County Bank building where Slawinski used to run his Old Market Antiques businesses.

It's being run by two local residents who talk in lofty terms about using their business to "help the community."

"I've always been struck by the kind of friendliness and the small-town atmosphere of Boulder Creek," says owner Shasta Wallace, who formerly was food services manager for the Vajrapani Institute, a Tibetan Buddhist retreat in the hills outside of town.

Wallace and Hoep White, who also attends the retreat, opened their business a week ago.

Sales of homes have also picked up, says real estate broker Tom Pimental.

"I had the best December I've had in 20 years," said Pimental.

Rental properties, commercial or residential, disappear as soon as they hit the market, although this has always been the case in Boulder Creek.

Says Belanger, "I have talked to almost all of the businesspeople and they say they're doing great."

"Boulder Creek has bounced back," Lupo says.

The Boulder Creek community has worked apart from the greater San Lorenzo Valley towards a number of improvement projects. Last year the sidewalks were replaced and the utility lines were put underground.

Dedication ceremonies for the new Boulder Creek Library will be sometime next month.

Some business representatives readily acknowledge that the town has come a

long way since the storm of 1982.

For others, however, even mentioning the flood is a touchy subject. They blame the media for Boulder Creek's hard times.

"We've had so much negative publicity ... the storm was three years ago, and we still get calls from people thinking we're under a mudslide," said Belanger, one of many business representatives contacted who insisted this story present a "positive" image of Boulder Creek.

"I'd rather you didn't mention the storm at all."

Since 1982 Boulder Creek has not so much expanded as re-built. Renovation and remodeling, rather than construction, has been the rule in Boulder Creek.

"Being nestled in the mountains here gives the town its unique beauty but it also limits how much new construction can be done," says Locatelli.

"There's a limited amount of construction available," echoes Pimental. "What's here is here."

Slawinski says his tenants are more willing to spend money remodeling its buildings.

He also says Boulder Creek is the only one of the three Valley towns whose merchants pay for garbage service. And the only town group to own its own streetsweeper.

Residents point to two community activities as an impetus for the town to work together.

Janet and Klaus Westphal, owners of the Country Harvest Bakery, helped spearhead the town's first Christmas program in years.

Every store downtown put Christmas lights on their stores or in the trees lining Highway 9. A community Christmas tree lighting festival was held. Merchants provided babysitters for parents who wanted to go shopping, and Santa and his elves made various appearances.

The Westphals also helped organize an effort to collect Boulder Creek children's letters to Santa. More than 100 letters were personally answered and mailed to the children, says Janet Westfall.

"We haven't had a Christmas program in years and it seemed like a good thing to do," she says. "It was pretty successful. We'd like to do it again next year."

The Christmas program also had a more pragmatic effect: to encourage residents to shop locally.

The fifth annual Halloween program was another success. Some 2,000 kids in

costume went trick-or-treating at downtown businesses, whose employees dressed up in costume and handed out candy.

"It was a safe, sane thing to do for Halloween. The kids had a ball, and the parents didn't have to worry about where the candy was coming from," says Slawinski.

Slawinski points to a survey mailed to residents last year as another reason for the downtown community's renovation. The business association asked Brookdale and Boulder Creek residents what type of businesses they'd like to see downtown. Many of the new shops reflect those choices, says Slawinski.

Slawinski has lived in Boulder Creek for 20 years, running an antiques store and working as an auctioneer.

He first visited Boulder Creek when he was working for Lockheed in Sunnyvale. "I couldn't believe how beautiful it was," Slawinski recalls. He put a deposit down on a house that day.

The town hasn't changed much in terms of size. Since there's not much room for expansion, the town can't get bigger, says Slawinski. Instead, it should try to get better.

"Boulder Creek is starting up again," he says.