

TITLE
1970's -
1980's

A bit of Watsonville history goes on the auction block

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WATSONVILLE — For sale: One city block in central downtown Watsonville. Terms: Cash, bank card or approved check with bank letter.

Yes, Watsonville, there is a Santa Claus and his name is Tom Sydes of A&A Auction Galleries.

Sydes will lead anyone who's interested in a walking auction Tuesday, at 10 a.m., through the vacant stores and businesses of the city's

200 block.

The lower Main Street block — or at least most of it — will be on the auction block then, as the city proceeds with its redevelopment plans for downtown. Everything is up for sale in the now-vacant stores from First Street to Star Surplus on Main Street, and around the block on Rodriguez Street. The six buildings on Main Street at the Second Street side are excluded from the auction.

The city, acting as the Redevelopment Agency, has bought the build-

ings and their contents and hopes to recoup some of that money through the auction.

"I haven't the foggiest idea what we'll get," said City Manager John Radin.

Everything from doors, windows, tools, washers and dryers, huge refrigerators, antique lighting fixtures, even Victorian ceilings will be sold. Sydes also promises to sell the city's fleet of used cars and about 50 bicycles recovered by the police but unclaimed.

In all, he said, about 500 to 600 items are available.

Anyone who wants to bid on an item will be asked to sign in by giving a name and address, Sydes said. In return, he'll get a number to use during bidding. Sydes said buyers will be charged a "buyer's premium" of 10 percent of the amount of purchase.

Sydes works on a commission that varies from 6 percent to 40 percent, depending on the object being sold.

Buyers will have three days to

remove their purchases, or lose them to the wrecker's ball. By mid-December, Radin said, bids for the demolition work should be going out.

The city must clear the spot where the Post Office is going to relocate, and have the site ready for construction by March 1.

The Post Office is the linchpin in the redevelopment plans for the 200 block. Once that is in, city officials will look to San Jose developer Barry Swenson to develop the remainder of the block into a 38,000 square-foot commercial center.

The city is also looking for a private developer to renovate the 100 block of downtown.

Sydes calls the auction "historic. Most of the structures date to the 1880s," he said.

"Here we've got a brand-new building," said Sydes, pointing to

City Hall, "and 50 feet away we've got a slice of history, where the buildings are 100 years old."

Who knows what will be found? he wondered. Sydes said he suspects at least one building has a Victorian ceiling hidden underneath a false ceiling. "I'd be willing to bet dimes for doughnuts on that," he said.

A former professor of history at the University of Virginia, Sydes said he got into the auction business "because it's fun."

Asked if he buys much of what he sees, Sydes said, "No. I've been in and out of the business for over 20 years. There's no room left in my house."

But he maintains a soft spot in his heart for art glass.

Despite his experience, Sydes said he's "never done a city block before. It's a first."

REFERENCE

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