

New owner hopes to breathe life into Brookdale Lodge

By Joe Shreve
Press-Banner

Hotels and Boarding Houses

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A new chapter has begun for one of Santa Cruz County's most historic buildings, as the Brookdale Lodge was officially purchased last week by a Santa Cruz-based hotelier.

On Tuesday, July 22, Pravin Patel, who has owned and operated hotels in Santa Cruz, Watsonville, and Pebble Beach for more than 20 years, officially closed escrow on the property, which has sat unused for nearly 3 years.

Patel, who has worked closely with Santa Cruz County officials in his pursuit of purchasing the property, said that his goal is work to restore and repair the Lodge's tarnished reputation and tourist appeal.

He purchased the Lodge from the State Bank of India, which had foreclosed on the property after the previous operator, Sanjiv Kakkar, defaulted on his mortgage amid a deluge of legal troubles that resulted in a criminal indictment and jail time.

"The whole thing is moving forward," Patel said of his \$2.7 million investment. "This property is dying to come back to life — it needs major CPR."

The property, as famous for its alleged ghosts as for the celebrities and politicians who frequented it in its World War II-era heyday, has been shuttered since October 2011, when Boulder Creek fire officials shut down the property due to safety violations.

Since then, the property has sat vacant, save for an on-site caretaker.

That, however, has not stopped a combination of vandals, would-be squatters, looters, and years of deferred maintenance from making restoration a massive undertaking.

Patel said that he believes that he is up to the challenge, and said that his goal is to complete the first phase of the property's restoration — the hotel rooms and the retail shops — by the beginning of 2015.

"I want to really take my time and do it right," he said. "It could be world-class again."

Patel said he is determined to avoid what he described as the mistakes of previous owners, and will not be renting out sections of the Lodge as long-term housing — which, he said, had proven troublesome as tenants and tourists often did not mix.

"The biggest mistake they made was crossing clientele," Patel said, adding that the focus of the Lodge would be as a hotel, appealing to tourists with amenities such as shuttles to local attractions such as Roaring Camp Railroads, the Mystery Spot, and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

He said that, once the hotel and retail section is reopened, he will focus his attention on the bigger issue of restoring the lobby, venue area, and famous Brook Room — all of which bear some level of damage from vandals, the elements, and general disrepair.

"It didn't get run-down overnight," Patel said. "So it's not going to be fixed overnight either."

As the restoration progresses, he said that he would like to highlight the long and storied history of the Lodge and plans to create tributes to the events, people, and stories that the establishment has had a role in.



The burnt southern part of the Brookdale Lodge complex will be torn down under the new ownership.

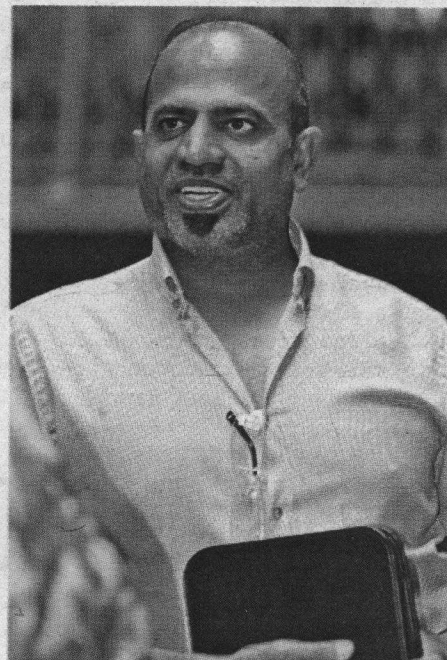
"I would really, really like to bring it back in time to when it was classy," Patel said. "I don't know when it was the last time it was run at a peak respectable level."

Patel said that he wants to be as involved in the community as possible as he becomes part of the San Lorenzo Valley business community, and said that he plans on reaching out to the San Lorenzo Valley communities for input as to what they'd like to see as the Lodge develops.

"This belongs to the community," he said. "I may be the owner, but I need the local community's input — I'm going to need all the help I can get."

Hank Emmons, who has served as caretaker of the property while it sat vacant, said that he believed that the Lodge reopening would be a welcomed sight in the Valley, given the number of people he's found on the property making pilgrimages to where weddings, anniversaries, and other memorable life events have taken place.

"People come back to this place," he said. "Everybody's got a story that comes to the barricade."



Pravin Patel, the new owner of the Brookdale Lodge, talks about his plans for reopening the troubled landmark.

Photos by Lucjan Szewczyk/Press-Banner