

*Pacific Garden Mall 1992* *Oct. 15, 92*

# The greening of the mall

## Trees give downtown a fresh look

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**B**EFORE THE Loma Prieta earthquake, it was known as Pacific Garden Mall. But three years of dirt, demolition and digging has put a thick layer of dust on the garden aspect of Pacific Avenue.

Now, the greenery is coming back.

The London plane and flowering cherry trees are in place along both sides of Pacific Avenue and in about three weeks, white birch trees will dot the median that will extend down the street south of Cathcart Avenue.

For the finishing touches, concrete is being poured for the garden areas that will adorn each intersection. Pin oaks will be planted at each end of the garden areas and annuals and low-growing shrubs will fill the space between.

For Carol Scurich, the planting is the reward for three years of planning, debate and research into what kinds of trees are best suited for an area that is vital to both businesses and the people who like the mall for its more social aspects.

Scurich, who before the earthquake was a recreation supervisor with the city Parks and Recreation Department, has spent the last couple of years supervising the downtown streetscape. The process has not been without its problems, as merchants, planners and patrons often clashed on what was best for the mall. But strangely enough, Scurich holds a special appreciation for that debate.

When downtown was destroyed in the earthquake, more than buildings were lost. Downtown, Scurich said, also was a social place, a place where people could take a break, walk and chat with friends. So when it came time to plan the rebuilding, everyone had an idea on how it should proceed.

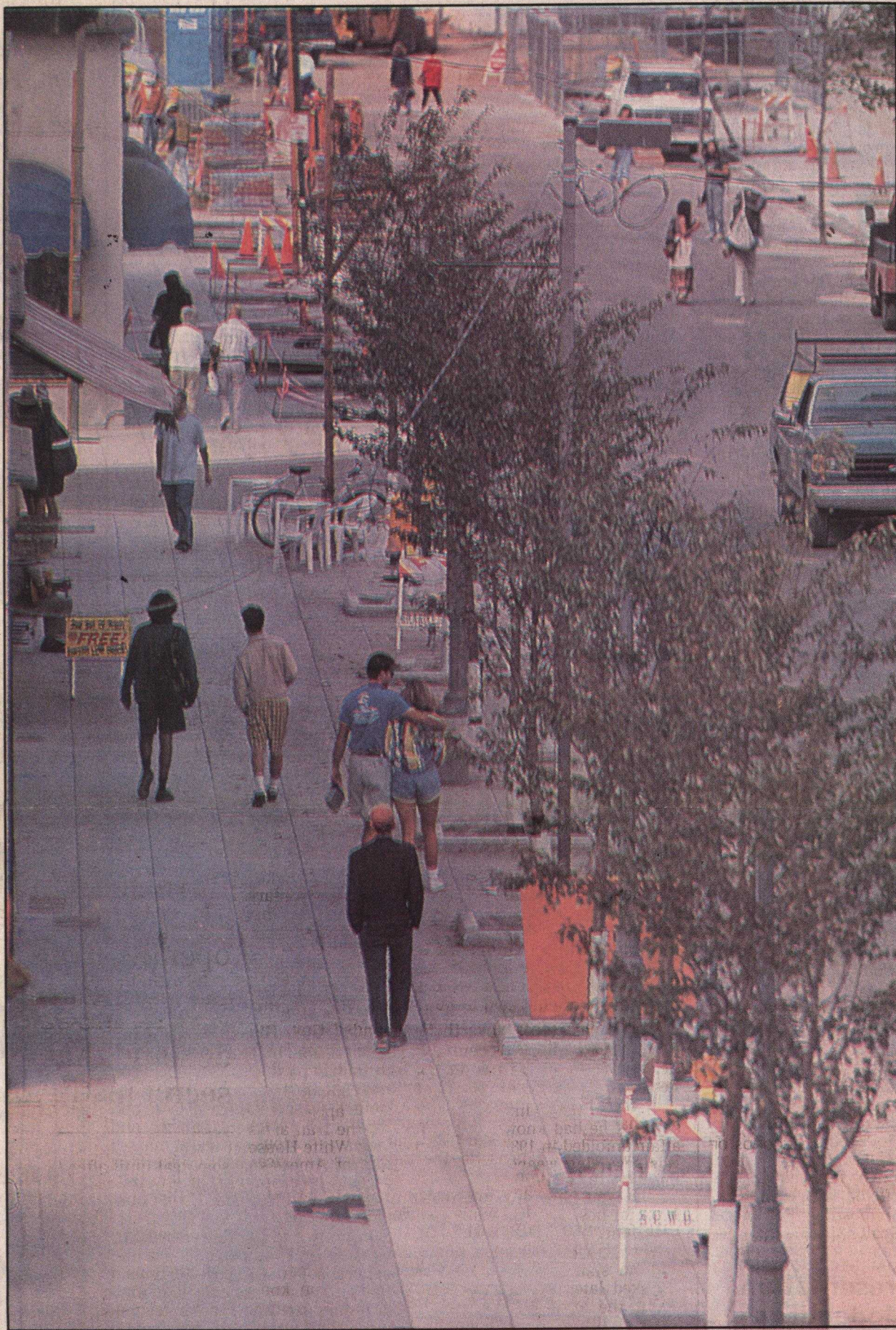
"People put a lot of care and thought in what they wanted in their downtown area," she said as she walked down the street where construction crews were busy moving and smoothing dirt.

The result, she said, was a compromise that serves the needs of business owners and will make people comfortable when they come downtown.

At the heart of that compromise are tall trees that may cause a double-take among arborists. It's not that the London plane, a type of sycamore, or the flowering cherry are unusual choices for a downtown, but it's the way they are pruned.

To accommodate street lights, and merchants' desire for visibility, the trees — spaced 25 feet apart — have been pruned higher than normal. In the case of the London planes, which line the east side (or Palomar Inn side), the first branches are some 12-14 feet off the ground. The trees will eventually grow to 35-40 feet tall, with a crown about 25 feet wide. The flowering cherries, although somewhat lower

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos



By Thanksgiving, some 236 trees will have been planted downtown. Supervising the Pacific Avenue streetscape project is Carol Scurich.



# Trees

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— the first branches are 6-7 feet off the ground — are still pruned high for that type of tree. As they grow, the crotch will move up. The cherries are planted on the opposite side of the street.

London planes are deeply rooted in Santa Cruz landscapes. The deciduous trees also are planted along Walnut Street, but walking down Walnut will not necessarily give you an idea what downtown will look like. Unlike the Walnut Street trees, which have not been pruned, the downtown London planes will be pruned regularly to allow sunlight to filter through to the sidewalk below.

“We don’t want a thick, real tight look,” Scurich said.

While the London planes will tower over the east side of the street, the flowering cherries, at least in the spring, will bring a soft look to the west side. In the spring, the trees sport petite pink flowers that will be “absolutely gorgeous,” Scurich said. What kind of show the trees will put on next spring is uncertain as they settle into their new home, but by 1994 they should be in full bloom, she said.

When the planting is finished — target date is Thanksgiving — the city will have planted 130 London planes, 62 flowering cherries, 36 white birch and eight pin oaks.