

Marinovich demolition off to a wild, mistaken start

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

It was a wild morning at the Marinovich Building.

A demolition crew moved into the 81-year-old structure today and began tearing out the insides, as historical preservationists screamed that they had been betrayed by Wells Fargo Bank.

But after the brouhaha died down, it appeared the whole thing was a mistake.

"Some subcontractors entered the building without authorization from us," said a spokesman from Granite Construction Co., who asked not to be identified.

Granite has been hired by the bank to demolish the structure and build a parking lot at Peck and Main streets. The Watsonville-based firm hired Randazzo Enterprises of Seaside as a subcontractor to do the demolition work.

Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Chris Cottle Monday lifted a temporary restraining order that had prevented the bank from tearing down the structure. But Tuesday a senior vice president for Wells Fargo, Dan Livingston, gave assurances that

the building wouldn't come down until the protests over the demolition were further evaluated.

A series of events began after Chuck Rowe, who had filed the lawsuit against the bank, noticed the demolition crew as he was driving by the Marinovich Building shortly before 9 a.m. He asked one worker what the crew was doing, and was told that it was stripping out the interior and that the building would be razed Friday or Saturday.

Rowe then informed Pat Pirtle of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association. She in turn called a Granite Construction official, who drove to the building and told the demolition crews to leave.

"We're thankful he was responsive," Rowe said of the Granite official's action.

In the meantime, word of the "demolition" spread quickly and a demonstration was organized at 11:30 a.m. The demonstrators, however, found that when they arrived they had nothing to demonstrate about, since the demolition work had been halted. Instead, they gathered in the city

Plaza for an impromptu conference with TV, radio and newspaper reporters.

Some preservationists thought that the action was in violation of a "grace period" (to file an appeal) following Judge Cottle's decision on Monday, but the judge said this morning that there was so such period. He said the plaintiffs hadn't asked for a "stay" after the ruling was handed down, and thus there was nothing legally stopping Wells Fargo from tearing down the building.

Apparently, only minor damage was done to the inside of the building. Some woodwork was taken down and the demolition crews began destroying some of the walls.

Livingston of Wells Fargo this morning was surprised to learn of the arrival of the demolition crew. He repeated his assurance that the building won't come down until he speaks with local bank and city officials, and possibly some historical preservationists.

"The last thing we want to do is come in the dark of night and tear the building down," he said. "That would be wrong."

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