

# Local

## HOSTELS

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# Historic cottages may be reborn as youth hostel

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SANTA CRUZ — A few months ago, it looked like a historic set of graceful Beach Hill cottages might melt into the ground before would-be renovators could come up with financing.

But the six little Carmelita Cottages, on Main Street between Second and Third streets, may become a youth hostel yet since the arrival of an entrepreneurial general contractor, Santa Cruz resident Allan Baer.

In the past six weeks, Baer has overseen the first stage of cleaning up the property, with the help of 11 young workers and a supervisor provided by the county-run Job Training Partnership program.

They hacked back the weeds and some overgrown vegetation, and, with city permits in hand, tore down a couple of substandard, decidedly unhistoric additions clinging to the sides of some of the original buildings — the oldest of which dates back to the 1860s.

They washed down the dusty whitewashed exterior walls, hauled accumulated junk out of the cottages, and gave the pretty hardwood floors a once-over.

That bit of tender loving care has given new dignity to the six small wooden buildings on a shady patch of

property on the hill.

With its stately trees and now more neatly manicured wisteria, rhododendrons and other decorative shrubs, the property is looking more like the city park it is.

Friday was the crew's last day on the job. The workers wolfed down a congratulatory pizza lunch, while Baer and members of the local and regional hostel boards laid plans for raising money for heavy structural renovation still ahead.

Willed to the city in 1955 by a woman named Lottie Sly, the buildings were designated as historical landmarks and the property was dubbed a city park.

Five years ago, the city leased the property to the Santa Cruz Youth Hostel Society. The hostel organization proposed to renovate the buildings at a cost then estimated at \$175,000, and turn them into a 45-bed year-round hostel for travelers, young and old.

But as hostel leaders made their way through the city planning and building bureaucracy, they discovered that the buildings needed extensive renovation to meet newer standards for quake safety, handicap access and insulation, said Peter Kambus, a board member of the Santa Cruz society.

They found out the renovation bill might be as high as \$850,000.

The buildings have no foundations, so the struc-

tures must be jacked up foundations and reinforcements put under them. The buildings are single-walled, so they need insulated interior walls. Other expensive tasks must be done as well.

Baer has big plans, not only to renovate the place, but to turn the renovation project into a learning laboratory.

He hopes to attract grants and loans from government agencies, and to bring student workers from community colleges and high school vocational programs such as the county Regional Occupational Program. He hopes to attract troubled youths and young workers in the California Conservation Corps and Job Training Partnership program.

All on a budget of about \$1.2 million in grants, loans, state allocations and in-kind labor.

Baer is planning to found a non-profit corporation to employ several staff members, including a professional fund-raiser who can write grant proposals for money from agencies such as the state Department of Education, the Summer Youth Employment Training Program, Coastal Conservancy and others.

He wants to bring in ROP teachers to run classes on construction, to prepare the young workers for the actual job.

Baer said the construction material and labor costs will be fairly fixed, and probably less expensive than

purely professional work. But the education and training portion of the project will push the budget high.

If he succeeds in putting the proposal together, Baer said work could start in a year, and could be done 12 to 18 months after that.

Local hostel society board members Kambus, Bill Shakespeare and Peter Young all said they are hopeful the job will be done in the next couple of years, so the hostel can start operating and returning the society some of its investment.

They are especially hopeful that renovation can be finished early on at least one of the six buildings, the largest and oldest one at the front of the property. It could be opened to serve more than a dozen hostel travelers, bringing the hostel society some needed income while the rest of the renovations are finished.

The organization holds a 10-year lease on the property, with an exclusive option to renew for another 10 years.

Jan Sorge, a Merced resident who is president of the Central California Council of the hostel organization, said hostel leaders want the cottages to be part of a chain of hostels all along the California coast and inland toward Yosemite and the Sierra range, all within bicycling distance of each other.