

S.C. harbor slips suddenly easy to get

For the first time in 35 years, there's no wait

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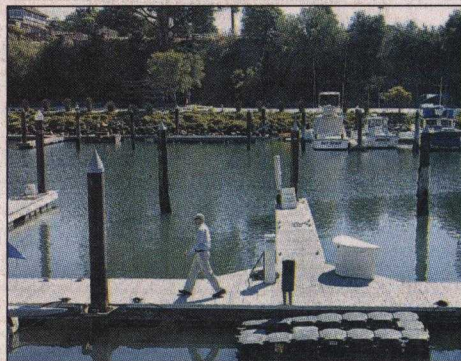
SANTA CRUZ — For the first time in 35 years, there is no waiting list to store boats in the upper Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor.

"It's a big deal," said Brian Foss, the former longtime port director who still works part time for the district. "A lot of people suffer from the common wisdom that you can't get a slip in Santa Cruz harbor, a big berth, so they don't even try. And it's not true any more."

As many as 15 30-foot slips are available

in the upper harbor, which is the section north of the Murray Street bridge. Up to five 20- to 25-foot berths also are available.

The situation is a very new development at a harbor where anglers and sailors commonly wait a generation for a place to dock their boats. That wait remains in the lower harbor, which is south of the Murray Street bridge, and closer to the harbor mouth. But anyone wanting to dock in the upper harbor can walk right in today and sign up. Harbor



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Port Director Rick Smith walks past vacant slips in the upper harbor last week.

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officials will even give them the first two months' rent free.

This is the first time there has not been a waiting list for upper harbor berths since it was built in 1973, Foss said.

Port Director Rick Smith blamed the economy and this year's state closure of salmon season for the vacancies.

Some boat owners are thinking, "if I can't fish and the price of gas is up and the economy is down," they might as well take their boats out of the water, Smith said.

Fisherman Ken Hardy, 72, of San Jose is one of those people. He plans to haul his 22-foot Davis out of the harbor at the end of next month. The boat's been at the harbor since 1992, when he retired from Lockheed, now Lockheed Martin.

Hardy said he made his decision "because there's no salmon. It's fun to go out in a boat, but it's not really what I had in mind when I got the slip."

Instead, he will trailer his vessel to Monterey or Half Moon Bay, where he can catch rock fish or crab, he said.

Commercial fisherman Mike Hubbell, 61, of Campbell, was

making repairs to his boat in the lower harbor Thursday morning. He sat out this fishing season because of the salmon closure, and made money working as a welder.

If the salmon season closes again, he said he might sell his boat and leave the harbor, too. Rising fuel prices are especially painful; he recently paid \$12,000 to fill up his 2,100-gallon tank.

"I think the price of fuel is probably the big thing," Hubbell said, noting that upper harbor berths mainly hold power boats, because most sailboats are too tall to pass under the bridge. Power boats often consume \$300 of fuel per day, he said, which could contribute to the slip vacancies.

But Smith remains optimistic. Most of the harbor's new tenants, he said, are locals who have always thought it would be nice to dock in Santa Cruz, but never believed they could get a space.

The single-side slips run \$10.13 per foot per month, according to the district.

"People, as they become aware of it, they're taking us up on the opportunity," Smith said. "They're happy to hear there is some availability."

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