

# Car dealer motoring down to Soquel

*Auto Plaza - Capitola*  
 Toyota to expand into Ocean's Capitola space after Honda moves to new digs

By JONDI GUMZ  
 SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

If you want to know what's trendy in car dealerships, ask George Avanesian.

He's designed more than 100 dealership facilities since making it his specialty a decade ago. Of his 28 "stores" in the works, two are in Santa Cruz County.

At 72, he has no plans to retire. "You get to a point where you don't call them, they call you," Avanesian, an architect with 38 years

experience, said from his office in South San Francisco. "That's very nice. To retire from that would be pretty stupid."

His two local clients: Ocean Honda and Toyota of Santa Cruz are currently neighbors at the Capitola Auto Plaza.

Steve John's Ocean Honda is leaving Capitola to build a 35,000-square-foot facility, twice as large

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Contributed photo

South San Francisco architect George Avanesian produced this design for a 35,000-square-foot Ocean Honda dealership on Soquel Drive in Soquel.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

This is the construction site in the 3000 block of Soquel Drive in Soquel where Ocean Honda will relocate.

## Dealer

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as his current one, next to the Stor-More self-storage complex under construction at 3801 Soquel Drive, Soquel. Construction will take a year. John hopes to open in March 2009.

The move means all the sales tax from selling 1,200 Hondas a year will shift from Capitola city coffers to the county of Santa Cruz.

John got county approval to relocate, but the project was on the back burner until Charles Canfield, who owns the Toyota dealership, told John he wanted to expand. The expansion "allows the dealership to stay where they are rather than find a new location," Canfield spokesman Kris Reyes said.

Avanesian has offered Canfield several ideas for a new Toyota facility.

Ocean Honda expects to get a building permit for its new facility "shortly," John said Friday.

Avanesian's design consists of a lot of glass, with two gigantic blue cylinders — a design element used by Honda nationwide — marking the entry. The 4.2-acre site will have room for 337 vehicles, compared to 210 at the existing 3.3-acre location.

Inside, customers waiting for their vehicles to be serviced will find features designed to keep them happy, like a larger play area for children.

The dealership already provides wireless access, freshly brewed coffee, vending machines, a massage chair and — for those who want to stay fit — bicycles. All those will stay, John said.

Car aficionados will be able to buy Honda shirts, hats and accessories in the "parts boutique" and

performance components in the "speed shop."

But wait, there's more.

■ An information desk, similar to what Bay Federal Credit Union has, to help customers get what they want faster.

■ More shuttles, three instead of two, expanding to provide service to Scotts Valley and Watsonville.

■ More loaner cars, three instead of one.

■ A 20-minute oil change.

"That's something customers have been asking for," said general manager John Prentice, 38, who has worked for John for 20 years.

"We're looking at solar for lights and electricity," Prentice added. "It's quite expensive, but we think it's what the customers want."

Toyota's hybrid, the Prius, is the dominant in that market, but Honda is top rated when it comes to producing clean cars and trucks. John dropped the Chevy line in February to make room for the more popular Hondas.

Avanesian just finished the Lexus dealership at the Fremont Auto Mall, which has multiple lounges, a manicurist, pedicurist, PlayStation video games for kids and shuttle service to stores and restaurants.

The scene is similar at the Daly City Toyota, a five-story facility on 3 acres, where customers can get lunch free while they wait for their warranty work to be finished.

"It's cheaper than giving you a loaner," Avanesian said.

These large dealerships with 60 service bays are handling 150 to 200 cars a day, he pointed out, so "you want to keep these people happy."

Don't expect Honda to offer a free lunch, though.

A sandwich shop is going in as part of the storage complex next door.