Capitola Village Becomes Choice Spot

By TOM HONIG
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Capitola Village, even on the laziest of summer afternoons, is not designed for the lethargic-at-heart.

Fishermen, boaters and gawkers crowd onto the wharf; the sand on the beach disappears under human bodies. The Esplanade, a semi-circular street near the beach, is trampled by crowds looking for soft drinks, hamburgers and snow cones. A block away, on Capitola Avenue, the row of craft and specialty shops is aswarm with shoppers.

But in February of 1977, the year without a winter, Capitola Village has become a choice spot to wile away a sunny afternoon — without battling crowds.

The sun banks off the blue ocean waters and warms the village. There is life in the streets, as shoppers and strollers meander down Capitola Avenue, but it's nothing like the thundering herd of summer.

"There used to be a time when the town died every winter," Alida Stevens-Smith, a Capitola Village merchant, said. She was talking about the Capitola Village of the past, when stores depended solely on the summer tourist trade. Presently, specialty shops and crafts merchants say that steady customers provide them with enough income to keep their stores open all winter.

That means, of course, that the town doesn't die in winter anymore. It also means that Capitola is basking in that magic land between the summer crush and the winter desolation.

But are the good times temporary?

The crowds will return this spring. The lack of normal rainfall is worrisome to everyone in California, including those in Capitola. But some Capitola residents are wondering how the big new shopping center on 41st Avenue will affect life in Capitola Village.

The City of Capitola has annexed land on 41st Avenue, about a mile from the village. The owners of the land are developing it into a shopping mall with two large stores, Mervyn's and Sears, and a host of smaller stores, most of which are chain stores.

The small town merchants in the Capitola Village don't view the construction of the big shopping center with alarm; or if they do, they don't complain about it.

Carin Mudgett, who sells a number of different hand-made items from her shop, The Craft Gallery, said, "I don't think that

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Capitola Mall will hurt us at all."

She said that some of Capitola Village's clothing stores might suffer somewhat, because of competition, but pointed out that "our unique specialty shops will not be hurt. On the contrary, people will filter down this way and discover what the village has to offer."

What the village has to offer, she said, is "top quality" shopping.

Other merchants took much the same view. Dianne Graves, who owns a small book shop called The Bookworm, said mall shopping will draw some people, while "people like me that don't like one-stop shopping in shopping centers will keep coming here. The reason we moved away from San Jose was to get away from big shopping centers."

She hastened to add that she supports the annexation of the shopping center into Capitola. Her husband, Ron, is a Capitola City Councilman and voted in favor of the annexation.

"Don't get me wrong. We support 41st Avenue, and we hope that they support us. After all, I'm curious. I know that as soon as they open I'll be up there looking around."

Stevens-Smith, who operates The Cornucopia, a gift store which specializes in soaps, herbs, teas and spices, also spoke of her support of the new mall, although she failed to hide her patriotism for the village. "You know, we're having a big kite-flying celebration on the beach March 20. That's what's nice about the village; you can sponsor things like that. You couldn't fly kites in a parking lot."