



Rossi family photo

The Opal Cliffs Food Center, shown circa 1950, was the first shopping center in the now-bustling 41st Avenue business district.

DEMOLITION OF OPAL CLIFFS MARKET PAVES WAY FOR NEW SHOPS, HOUSING IN PLEASURE POINT AREA

A landmark's last gasp



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Jerry Pettibone, a 35-year resident of the Opal Cliffs neighborhood, watches as the Opal Cliffs market building is demolished on Wednesday. *Business-O-P* 10.31.02

By **NICOLE STRICKER**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

PLEASURE POINT — A Pleasure Point makeover began Wednesday with demolition of the former Opal Cliffs market at 41st Avenue and Portola Drive.

The building, built by an Italian immigrant in 1946, once housed a treasured market and the first shopping center on now-bustling 41st Avenue.

The razing will make way for a restaurant, shops and apartments, all in a new two-story building.

Some long-time residents of the neighborhood said they were sad to lose the landmark, but conceded the building, which had been empty for nearly 10 years, needed to go.

"The old building was in pretty bad shape, so it's one of those things that had to be done,"

said Jerry Pettibone, a 35-year resident of the neighborhood who strolled from his house to watch the demolition Wednesday morning.

Domenico Legge built the market for his son and son-in-law to run when 41st Avenue was still a lazy farm road, surrounded by cattle ranches and strawberry fields. He built two apartments above the store and a house for himself next door.

The Opal Cliffs Food Center was renowned for its produce and meat market. Domenico's son drove to San Jose at 3 a.m. each day to fetch produce for the store. Butchers wrapped meat to order.

Customers treasured the store's personal touch. It was run over the years by three generations of Legge's family.

"You probably paid more, but you didn't mind, because they knew you by your first

name. Mr. Rossi used to pick our son up and put him in our basket," Pettibone said of Legge's son-in-law.

Midge Rossi and Elmo Legge ran the market for 20 years, adding a pharmacy and other shops along the way. In 1966 the families leased out the store, which became the Pink Elephant Market. They sold the property 10 years later.

As large supermarkets gained popularity, the smaller store lost customers and closed for good in 1994.

"We hated to see the market close because it was a good market in its day," Pettibone said. "They had a good meat market, one of the best, and it stayed that way right to the end."

The market has been empty since, though other center tenants have come and gone,

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including a martial arts studio and a beauty shop.

In 1997, Martin Drobac and Janet, Thomas and Cottardo Stagnaro bought the property, including the 10,000-square-foot market, for \$1.3 million.

They said at the time that they hoped to create a retail gateway for the area, and aimed to refurbish the center and fill the vacancies.

The owners were unavailable to comment Wednesday, but Greg Hendee, project manager, said it didn't make economic sense to renovate.

"The building didn't have the memories — it was the people who worked there," Hendee said.

Site clearing is expected to wrap up next week, and Hendee hopes to begin construction of the new building by winter, though he said building permits have yet to be issued.

The new Opal Cliffs Center will boast a restaurant with patio seating, retail space for eight shops and, on the second floor, seven one-bedroom apartments with patios overlooking 41st Avenue.

"The area's coming back to life again," Hendee said. "It will get rid of an eyesore and the area will be active again."

Though the corner may soon reclaim its former glory, the Rossi and Legge families view the demolition with mixed emotions.

Legge's granddaughter Suzi Rossi worked and played in the store as a child.

"I think the saddest part for all of us grandkids was to see our grandparents' house go down."

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OPAL CLIFFS MARKET

Built: 1946

Became Pink Elephant Market: 1966

Vacant since: 1994

Sold for \$1.3 million: 1997