

SAN LORENZO VALLEY BUSINESS

Felton Pit Shop opens on Graham Hill Road

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New owner makes
\$600,000
investment

By JONDI GUMZ

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FELTON — Real estate agent Bryan Chambers is happy to see the newly remodeled Valero gas station open across from the Felton Faire shopping center.

"It looks nice," he said. "It's encouraging to seeing small businesses trying to improve."

The makeover was orchestrated by Scotts Valley resident Ken Bunter, who bought Felton Fuels at 6225 Graham Hill Road in October, undertook a remodel of the station and convenience store in mid-May, then reopened Aug. 11.

His investment: About \$600,000. He got a loan with Small Business Administration guarantee from Santa Cruz County Bank to finance the purchase and part of the construction.

"The rest was on me," he said.

He created three new jobs, including an outdoor attendant, which he hopes attracts customers.

The gas is competitively priced. On Monday, it was \$4.089 for a gallon of regular; at the Valero on Ocean Street in Santa Cruz, it was a penny higher.

For Bunter, 47, the venture is a return to his roots. He grew up in Santa Cruz, helping out his dad, who managed a gas station for Standard Oil and then Chevron.

After college, he started Advanced Blind and Shades in Soquel and spent 20 years there. He sold his shares to his



Ken Bunter plowed \$600,000 into the renovation of his Valero station in Felton.

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partners in January 2010, and began looking for a gas station to buy. Some didn't pencil out but the Felton location caught his eye.

"It was a fixer-upper with easy in-and-out for buying gas — a diamond in the rough," Bunter said. "I wanted to do a better job, remodel it, improve the neighborhood."

He felt he could attract tourists visiting nearby Roaring Camp or the Mount Hermon Conference Center.

"Mount Hermon has 500 to 2,000 people a week coming through," he said.

Bunter said the remodel took longer than expected because of the county review process. Contractor Troy Miller, a friend from Santa Cruz, did the work, creating a well-lit space to sell hot coffee, cold beverages, sandwiches and snacks.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: Felton Pit Shop, selling Valero gas, propane, hot food, beverages and snacks

WHERE: 6225 Graham Hill Road, Felton

HOURS: 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week

EMPLOYEES: Six

OWNER: Ken Bunter

INFORMATION: 335-2098

Beer is kept in a refrigerated room, which Bunter said should discourage underage buyers. Another new service is a propane pump.

The station is staffed by six employees, with Brooke Baltzer as manager, and Bunter expects service with a smile.

"When I put my ad on Craig-

slist, I said, if you're not friendly, don't apply," he said.

Others are seeing Felton as a good investment.

Mara Brodsky moved her green-certified salon, The Green Room, in May from Ben Lomond to 6231A Highway 9, across from New Leaf Community Market. Brodsky remodeled the former All About You salon herself and has three chairs staffed by independent contractors and is recruiting an esthetician.

New Leaf Market is remodeling, too. The vitamin department has moved to where the pharmacy was, and the bulk department will move to where the vitamins were, which will make room for the deli expansion. The project is expected to take a couple months.

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