

The Market Returns

DECADES-LONG TRADITION BACK AFTER THREE-MONTH HIATUS



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

George Feldman is a professional flea market vendor who traveled from Mill Valley to set up shop in the old Skyview Drive-In Friday. 'I do this for a living and there's no other weekday market like this,' he says of his favorite market.

Flea markets

Vendors happy to be selling wares locally again

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ

For vendors at the Santa Cruz flea market, it was like coming home.

Some got up at 4:30 or 5 a.m. to get their spot in the popular open-air market at the former Skyview Drive-in on Soquel Drive.

By 7:30 a.m., their booths were all set up, displaying everything from books and vinyl records to socks and boxer shorts to rugs and furniture — and an awful lot of stuff in between.

The conversations were friendly: "Hey brother, what's up?" "You are back!" "You've got a good spot, buddy."

It was almost as if the flea market had never closed.

In reality, Friday's opening revived a decades-long tradition that appeared doomed last November after the property was purchased by Sutter Health for future medical facilities.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Shirl Tiner, left, drove from her home in Fresno to sell at the reopening Friday. 'I'm so glad it's back,' she said.

Then Goodwill signed a one-year agreement with Sutter to operate the flea market while plans for the medical facilities are mapped out.

Voila! The flea market sprang to life like a wilted flower given water.

Michael Paul, Goodwill's pres-

ident and chief operating officer, was at the flea market site for the opening, watching a line of cars and pickups fill up the lanes to enter the drive-in property.

"For shoppers, it should be one of the better days," Paul said. "People have been collecting for three months with not

that much opportunity to sell."

Vendors were asking for the same spaces they had before, and got them "for the most part," he added.

He welcomed customer comments.

Santa Cruz Flea Market

WHERE: 2260 Soquel Drive, Santa Cruz, site of the former Skyview Drive-in.

WHEN: Gates open to vendors and buyers at 7 a.m. Fridays, 6 a.m. Saturdays and 5:30 a.m. Sundays, weather permitting.

TO RESERVE SPACE: In person reservations taken today between 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the flea market.

ADMISSION: Buyers, Fridays, \$1 per person; Saturdays, \$2 per person; Sundays, \$2.50 per person; vendors, Fridays, \$15 per space, Saturdays, \$30 per space, Sundays, regular space, \$35, large or corner space \$45 and up.

INFORMATION: www.scgoodwill.org/fleawhatsnew.html or call 423-8611.

Longtime chef Ron Romo talks up this papier mache rabbit to a potential buyer Friday at the reopening of the flea market. A 20-year veteran of the local flea market, Romo says he didn't realize how much he missed it until it was gone.

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Sentinel



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"If you find out what they don't like, I want to know," he said.

By day's end, the flea market staff had admitted about 150 vendors and between 1,200 and 1,300 shoppers.

"That's good for a Friday," said Paul, adding that larger crowds are typical for Saturday and Sunday.

As the market opened, about 50 people stood in line at the former drive-in ticket booth to reserve a space. Santa Cruz resident Larry Rubin, who sells imports from Thailand, got up at 5 a.m. to get a spot near the front of the line.

When the market closed, he sold his wares at other markets at more distant locations, including San Jose, Salinas and Hayward. He grumbled a bit about the wait, but conceded, "It's nice I don't have to drive."

One of the changes is that the drive-in food concession remains closed, pending improvements to meet codes. But other food options were available.

Jeff Chandler, 21, of Soquel, manned the Piza Express truck, selling snacks. He said he

would be at the market on Fridays to start.

Several vendors sold fresh fruits and vegetables, oranges, tomatoes and green beans, to name a few.

Salazar Produce of Watsonville offered two good-size artichokes for \$1 and five for \$2.

"Best deal in the flea market," said David Lawson, 64, of Santa Cruz, biting into a ripe banana he bought for a quarter. "There's a lot of money to be made out here."

Asked what he did while the market was closed, he answered, "Grieved a lot."

Santa Cruz architect Mark Primack, another flea market aficionado, came before work to check out the merchandise.

"It's early," he said, pulling back his sleeve to check his watch. "I've got a little time."

Tom Zahra, a father of four from Watsonville, staked out a booth behind the concession stand to display his collection of Oriental rugs. Prices started at \$35 for a small one, and \$80 for the larger ones.

He said he tried to sell in San Jose but gave up.

"Too much driving, too much competition," he said. "The economy's no good. Mortgages are high. You're working for nothing. Everybody's scared this year."

Along one of the fences, Santa Cruz resident Ed Felder arranged out an eclectic display of merchandise, pulling items out of his jam-packed van.

"I like to spread out so people can see things," he said.

The face of B.J. "Hooked on a Feeling" Thomas jumped out from the cover of a record album, "Happy Man," a description that seemed to suit Felder's mood.

One shopper bought a book from him, and another picked out the "Tax and Spend Deficit Reduction Game," a bargain at only \$1.

Felder, 60, appreciates being his own boss after working 22 years for IBM and Xerox.

"This keeps you young," he said. "Got to circulate to percolate."

Next to his space, Randy Dowling was trying to sell his 1991 red Mazda Miata with 170,000 miles on it. The price: \$2,500.

The voice of Johnny Cash reached out from the car stereo to passersby.

"I got a ticket for \$210 for playing the stereo in Santa Cruz," Dowling confided. "They said it was noise pollution."

But Friday at the flea market, no one seemed to mind.

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