

Rebirth of Cooper House near

Pacific Avenue
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SANTA CRUZ — Fractal Design Corp., a computer company known for its splashy graphics software, is the kick behind the comeback of the historical Cooper House — now on line to break ground in late April or early May.

The computer company has signed a letter of intent, and is negotiating a 10-year lease for 40,000 square feet, confirmed Mark Zimmer, Fractal Design president.

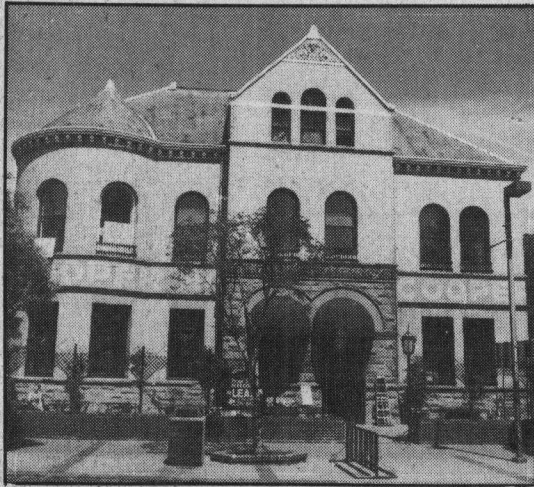
If a deal is struck, it would allow Jay Paul, owner of the former Cooper House, to rebuild what was once the most prominent landmark in downtown Santa Cruz, demolished after the Loma Prieta quake.

It would be the tallest, largest building on Pacific Avenue.

Paul said that if the computer company signs on, he will have 70 to 75 percent of the building leased. "We're pretty close to converting to final lease stage," said Paul.

That's a key in obtaining the financing, the elusive element that has kept Paul's rebuilding plans pending for the past five years.

Paul said he has arranged financing from a union pension fund, and will hire Rudolph & Sletten Inc. of Foster City as general contrac-



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel file

The Cooper House in 1988.

tors.

Construction could be completed by April 1996, Paul said Monday.

As tentatively agreed, Fractal Design will take at least two of the five floors to become the

major tenant of the building, said Zimmer.

The company, now housed in a 15,000-square-foot building on Spreckels Drive in Aptos, has 50 employees and could grow half again as much in the next year, he said.

The \$20 million replacement building for the Cooper House is a 100,000-square-foot building — more than twice the size of the original — five-story Mediterranean-style building with plans for a restaurant and retail shops on the ground floor.

"It's a very, very expensive, high-quality architectural building," said Paul. "If you looked at this building, you wouldn't be able to tell if it was built today or 50 years ago," he said.

The old Cooper House was considered by many to be the heart of downtown. Its demolition was a wrenching community experience; some people have yet to be convinced that the building couldn't be saved.

The lot at Pacific Avenue and Cooper Street is now vacant, bordered by a chain-link fence and overgrown with weeds.

Across Pacific Avenue, Palo Alto developer Jack Bariteau is building a nine-screen theater, scheduled to open in May.

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Cooper House rebirth

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The ground floor "footprint" of the theater will be slightly larger, with about 35,000 square feet, than the Cooper House's expected 25,000 to 30,000 square feet, according to Dick Stubendorff, Santa Cruz chief building official.

The theater marquee will be about the height of the new Cooper House, he said.

Paul said the theater construction was an important impetus to Cooper House plans gearing up.

"Santa Cruz is becoming a viable commercial center that's attractive," said Paul. "The theater confirms what's happening."

Fractal's Zimmer agreed. "We looked at a lot of areas," he said. "Downtown Santa Cruz really has a nice look to it now."

The company considered leasing sites at Harvey West Industrial Park, at the Sashmill, in Scotts Valley and in the soon-to-be completed theater, said Zimmer.

The Cooper House site won as "much more appropriate," he said. "There's a nice bookstore. There's the Catalyst and music stores and the theater is going in."

After seeing a model of the Cooper House and discussing possible sites with employees, the downtown Santa Cruz location "singled itself out as the one we wanted to go to," said Zimmer.

TGV of Santa Cruz, another fast-growing computer company, is across the street from the Cooper House site.

Founded in 1991, Fractal Design is a major force in multiple platform graphics software, creating and marketing paint, photo-design and image-retouching software for Apple Macintosh and Microsoft Windows computers. Among its products are Fractal Design Painter, Dabblor and Poser, a new product introduced last week.

When the high-tech company moves in, it will have been a long journey for the Cooper House site, once the Santa Cruz County Courthouse.

During the 1970s, the building metamorphosed into a collection of small stores, a restaurant and bar.

Its sidewalk restaurant/bar became the place to watch the swirl of dancers and characters that came to define Santa Cruz. It was a place to spend an afternoon contemplating the sunshine, conversation, and listening to Warmth, Don McCaslin's jazz band.

McCaslin is now playing at the Cooper Street Cafe behind where the Cooper House is planned. Ironically, owners of the Cooper Street Cafe are among those who are not looking forward to the reconstruction of the building.

"We're really excited about something going in that empty lot," said Kathy Beauregard, co-owner of the cafe. "But I'm very concerned what it will do to my business."

During the one-year construction, Beauregard said she feared the cafe's outdoor patio would be unusable because of the dust and noise.

Beauregard said they would like Paul to agree to stop construction during the lunch hour and on weekends, and to install a high barrier or screen to prevent dust from coming in the cafe.

"I don't know if it's reasonable for us to be able to do that," said Paul.

Downtown Association representative John Lisher said, however, that any inconvenience of construction is well worth it.

"Look, to swap that for a building, there's no comparison," said Lisher. "We'll hand out silver bullets for people to bite. The benefits to use are incredible in the long run."

"The Cooper House means so

much to so many people," he said. "It's just going to be exciting to anyone walking on the street."

According to Stubendorff, Cooper Street will be at least partially closed to automobile traffic during construction.

Paul has proposed using the sidewalk, on-street parking spaces and one lane of Cooper Street as the construction staging area and for storing two large cranes.

At times, one lane of Pacific Avenue will also close.

"It's going to be a chess game of street closures," he said.

Stubendorff said he expects architectural building plans to be submitted for a final check within a few weeks and a building permit issued about a month later.

Even before then, however, Stubendorff said the large gaping hole that once was the basement will be filled with sand so a foundation can be poured.

In addition to the Cooper House, several other buildings are going up downtown. Among them:

- The 8,695 square foot Plaza Lane building, owned by Eric Stolzberg, now under construction, at the north end of Pacific Avenue. The two-story building replaces the earthquake-demolished Penniman Title building and will house optometrist's offices on the ground floor and yet to be leased offices upstairs, according to Lee Slaff, commercial real estate broker.

- The Kinko's building being constructed at Laurel and Pacific Avenues. Last used as Halloween Headquarters, Barry Swenson Builders has started remodeling of the one-time Toyota dealership building to become the new site for Kinko's.