



Vanessa Bogenholm bags some greens at the new produce stand near the Redman-Hirahara home. The Redman Foundation is raising money to restore the 106-year-old Victorian house in Watsonville, and use the surrounding 13.4 acres for research and education.

Bill Lovejoy/
Sentinel

Nonprofit hopes to breathe life into old house

Historic Houses - South County

By KATE RAMSAYER
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

WATSONVILLE — While the 106-year-old Victorian house may look haunted to those who drive by it on Highway 1, a local nonprofit group is hoping to breathe some life into the Redman-Hirahara home and the Pajaro Valley agricultural tourism industry.

The Redman Foundation is raising money to stabilize and restore the house, and use the surrounding 13.4 acres for research and education. The group hosted an open house Friday that continues today, from noon until 4 p.m., to let the public get a close-up view of the house and see plans for the information center.

"We want to attract people who aren't necessarily well informed in agriculture to the agricultural experience," said Sean Swezey, president of the Redman Foundation.

The center will feature old farming equipment that illustrates agriculture from Redman's time, and exhibits on the industry today. Part of the land will be devoted to demonstrations of different organic and conventional crops, and 6 acres will be set aside for agricul-

Redman-Hirahara Open House and Farm Stand

WHAT: The public can visit the 106-year-old Victorian house in Watsonville, and support its restoration by buying produce at the neighboring organic farm stand.

WHERE: The intersection of Highway 1 and Riverside Drive.

WHEN: The open house is today from noon to 4 p.m., and the farm stand will be open from noon to 7 p.m., Thursday to Sunday, through October.

CONTACT: Sean Swezey at 332-6231. Donations can be sent to Redman Foundation, P.O. Box 2526, Watsonville, CA 95076.

tural research.

The farming project is well under way. The land where Redman once grew apples, sugar beets and other produce is home to 10 winter cover crops.

"We're letting (farmers) know the reasons to plant different ones, and see how they differ," said Vanessa Bogenholm, who led a group of growers through the fields Friday morning.

Bogenholm is on the Redman Foundation board and is chairman of California Certified Organic Farmers.

While the fields are being farmed, the William Weeks-designed house still needs a lot of work.

"From the highway it looks worse than it actually is," said Red-

man board member David Carnaghe.

While some of the original wood-working and detailing remains, the walls and foundations were severely damaged in the 1989 earthquake.

"I've always been curious about what it's like in there," said Aptos resident Nancy Lockwood, who drives by the house daily on her way to work. "It's beautiful when you get up close."

The group is hoping to raise \$200,000 to stabilize the structure. They plan to lift the building off the foundation, move it 100 feet, strengthen the foundation and add a wine cellar, then move the house back, said Geoff Scurfield, vice president of the Redman Foundation.

Part of the funds for the project

will be generated from the new Redman-Hirahara Farm Stand, located between the old house and the Chevron station.

"This is a great opportunity to showcase locally grown organic agriculture," Bogenholm said Friday. "Today we're going to have about 35 different organic products, all grown locally within 20 miles."

The stand will sell seasonal produce. This weekend, the list included fresh flowers, carrots, strawberries, lettuce, spinach and cabbage.

"I'm excited about this," said Roy Nagamine, who grows organic English cucumbers in his Watsonville greenhouse. "I think this a direction smaller farmers have to go in to be viable today."

And customers buying produce can do so knowing that they are helping restore the historic landmark along Highway 1.

"It's fabulous," said Judy Stabile of Watsonville, who bought marigolds and pickles. "It's great to see people taking the time and trouble bringing this house to life."

Contact Kate Ramsayer at kramsayer@santa-cruz.com.

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