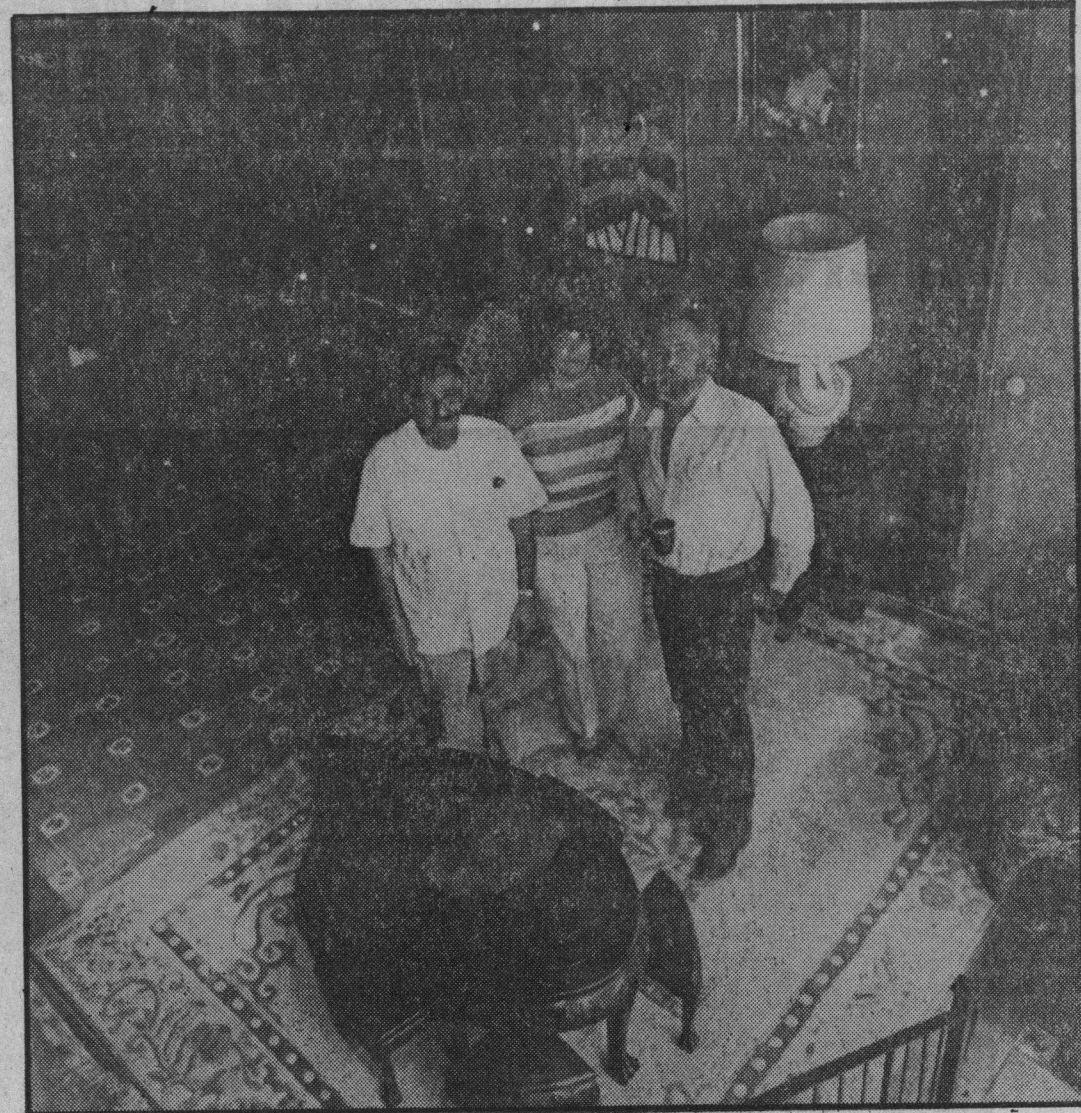




At left, one of the vendors at the Sky View Flea Market; at right, manager Joe Costanza and operators Marge and Vern Lee in the house that junk built. After traveling to flea markets around the country, the Lees wanted to start one that would treat people like they wanted to be treated. You can draw your own conclusions Saturday and Sunday at the market, 2240 Soquel Drive.



Bargains and Junk Abound At Flea Market

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER
Sentinel Staff Writer

One woman bought a ring for a dollar that she sold for \$400.

It's stories like these — some true, some apocryphal — that bring them back in droves to the Sky View Flea Market, where the best show in town happens before the movie.

Need a set of dishes for your new apartment? No problem. Some tools, perhaps? Wares at the flea market run the gamut from out-and out bargains to — well, junk.

them, man. They're like new, really.

Last Sunday a display of used office furniture sat next to a sign announcing quizzically, "Yesterday's Prices — Today Only."

And just outside the entrance a Hispanic boy stood next to a wiggling cardboard box trilling "P-r-e-t-t-y puppies! P-r-e-t-t-y puppies!"

"It's exciting. It's like a treasure hunt," observes Costanza. "The hunters know what they're hunting but they sellers don't always know what they've got."

furrow through boxes still in packing boxes. "A lot of 'em are antique retailers," says Costanza.

By 8 a.m. the vendor's spaces are sold out although Costanza says he will split a space in half to accomodate the overflow.

"We're flea market people — we know you'd rather have a tiny space than go home," adds Marge Lee, who with husband Vern owns the flea market.

The two junk junkies opened the fledgling market in 1971 with \$300 and a desire to fulfill their own flea market fever. They'd pack

doorknobs with flea market goods.

"We'd been to flea markets all over the country, and we wanted ours to treat people the way we always wanted to be treated," says Marge.

For that reason security guards at the Santa Cruz flea market do not carry guns or nightsticks. "They're just there for friendly persuasion," says Marge.

The biggest behavior problem at the market involves dogs. People get belligerent when asked to

not the biggest in the area, but it may be the friendliest, he adds. "We're the nicest. We bend over backwards for the customers, and try to make it like a family meeting out there every Sunday."

That includes slipping the regular sellers — "steadies" — a few bucks for gas or food if they have had a rotten day. Or sending them flowers if they're sick in the hospital.

A man selling an array of hardware items from the back of a truck last Sunday agrees with Costanza's

Among his goods: pocket combs, leather gardening gloves, playing cards, memo pads, dice, lighters, stationery, teeshirts.

"I buy in large amounts and I ratpack 'em," he explains. "I used to be a liquor wholesaler and that's where I bought a lot of the stuff."

"People," he continues, "are getting off their high horse about flea markets. They're tired of going to Macy's and paying those high prices."

Another man selling his second

There are tools, radios, household items. Incense. Produce. ("A big money-saver," notes manager Joe Costanza). Purses and paper. Clothes. Like-new cameras, cash only, no questions asked and no receipts offered, next to beat-up Monopoly games and scratched record albums, only a dollar each, I'm moving and I've got to get-rid of

The market is open weekends but it's Sundays that it takes on the atmosphere of an open-air carnival of consumerism. Some 7,000 people will pass by the average 350 sellers on your average sunny Sunday, Costanza estimates.

Bargain hunters show up at daybreak, flashlights in hands, to

their six children up and give each one something to sell to make the market look bigger. A good day meant 14 vendors.

"I used to cry when we'd open because I knew that meant we'd have to pay the \$125 opening fee," Marge recalls.

The flea market eventually turned a profit for the Lees and their new 22-room home on Alamo Street is furnished down to the

leave their canines outside. "Heck, they'd rather leave their husband or wife in the car and walk with their dog," Costanza notes.

As for the unsavory reputation of flea markets, Costanza asserts there is no trafficking in stolen goods there — although he admits it is next to impossible to detect hot merchandise.

The Santa Cruz flea market is

Costanza's assessment.

"The flea market in San Jose is like a freeway — all these people running around trying to find a bargain," says the man, hawking his goods like a carnival barker.

He preferred not to give his name. "You're not from the state Board of Equalization, are you?" he asks. His baseball cap was embroidered with the folk-wisdom, "Money Talks And B---- -- Walks."

hand household items found this to be true as well.

"I had no idea this stuff would move so fast," he observes. "It's best if you can sell the little odds and ends around the house, because people come here with three dollars in their pocket, and they're going to buy SOMETHING."

And buy something they certainly did.