

# A Terrible eyesore in Aptos

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**APTOS** — In the eyes of Aptos Village merchants, Terrible Herbst gas station lives up to its first name. Its shingles are dirty and sagging with age. Big, spiky weeds push at the outside fence.

Now local residents are getting frustrated and angry. They call the station an eyesore on a prominent corner, a visual blight that should rightfully be a cultural center, a movie theater, or at least a parking lot.

But the property owner is hard to reach, and no one has any solid plans. Meanwhile, the place just sits there.

"At least someone came and cut the weeds the other day," said Gwen Burkard, manager of the Bayview Bed and Breakfast Hotel in Aptos Village. She wants to see something done and hears a lot of ideas about the place. "But so far there's nothing concrete," she said.

The gas station is going for about \$700,000, according to local residents, but property owner Jerry Herbst could not be reached. His staff would not confirm this

price.

Herbst, who lives and works in Las Vegas, hasn't returned seven Sentinel phone calls over the past four working days, although his receptionists acknowledged Herbst was in the office at the time of each call.

"We can't just give him every message about a property he owns," one secretary said. "He'd be on the phone all day long. We'll tell one of his sons."

"He's in a meeting," another receptionist said on two occasions.

The Herbst sons didn't call back either.

One local resident who reached Herbst is Jack Metzger, an architect and developer who said he had little trouble getting through to the owner. "Nice fellow, very pleasant, but a firm businessman," said Metzger, member of the Aptos Community Foundation, a newly formed local cultural and civic organization.

"He'd sell it in a minute but he wants his price," Metzger said. "If you look at the numbers, by the time you went through the permit process and rented it out to some-

one, it would be a financial disaster."

Herbst owns a string of gas stations in California, Arizona and Nevada, has 37 convenience markets, and some oil and lube changing shops.

Area merchants say Herbst is a tough negotiator. Other than putting it up for sale about five years ago, Herbst has done little since the 1989 Loma Prieta quake damaged the station, forcing it to close.

Sam Blancato, owner of an empty pizza restaurant that sits across from Terrible Herbst, said he would like to get together with locals and buy the property, then turn it over to the public as a cultural center. Blancato said that if Herbst lowers the price, he and other buyers could name the building the "Jerry Herbst Cultural Center." But he said Herbst won't be moved.

"Here is a golden nugget waiting to be pulled out of the ground," said Blancato. Rosa's Roticeria will lease out his restaurant, opening a new eatery in the village this fall.

One unusual feature of this "eyesore" is its in-your-face location.

Like it or not, residents have to admit it is one of the most noticeable things in town.

"That is a corner of our village and that should be, in some way, attractive," Aptos Chamber of Commerce director Karen Hibble said. "That fence and all those signs — it's not appealing. We want a place where people can sit and talk and enjoy being in Aptos."

"We wish (Herbst) would donate it to the town of Aptos as a park," she added.

County Supervisor Walt Symons said he often gets calls from people anxious to see the county buy the Herbst property and turn it into a parking lot. Merchants frequently complain there is so little parking that visitors have no place to pull over and walk around. "But there's no funding for it," he said.

If it became an arts center, it would be a radical turn in the history of this Terrible Herbst station. It has a fairly unremarkable past, other than the fact that it was robbed relentlessly in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1980, it was knocked off twice in the same

# Village



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Terrible Herbst gas station sits at key Aptos Village location month.

But this change could be a long time coming. Blancato said it's been hard for him to get hold of Herbst.

The only option would be for Aptos residents to form a redevelopment district for the village, and apply for money for a "blight ar-

ea," Symons said.

Now, merchants are getting edgy. "It's the biggest eyesore on the face of the earth," said Ellie Mitchell at Scarlet O'Hara's Salon and Aptos Beauty Supply. "Sooner or later, the thing's gonna fall down."