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# Capitola's Begonia Image In Jeopardy

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One business has announced it may leave the Capitola area and already a lot of people are concerned the community's motto and whole image are in jeopardy.

Capitola's motto is "Begonia Capital of the World" and the business that may shortly close its doors is Vetterle Bros. Begonia Gardens.

Capitola has gotten a lot of tourist-dollar mileage from its title as begonia capital. Each September it hosts the Capitola National Begonia Festival which attracts thousands of visitors. It cancels all the stamps on its outgoing mail with a begonia capital reminder, and chamber of commerce brochures lean on the title as a community image.

Now that just one business — Vetterly Bros. — has announced it wants to close its Capitola operation, is the begonia capital title really in jeopardy?

Could be. There are only three major begonia growers in the Capitola area — Vetterle, Antonelli Bros. and Brown Bulb Ranch. Since Brown is a wholesale operation closed to the public, the loss of Vetterle would leave only Antonelli Bros. to prove to visitors that Capitola really does produce all those begonias.

But Mayor Phillip Walker isn't ready to throw in the towel. He doesn't think the loss of Vetterle's will make all that much difference.

"We never did have a begonia grower within the city limits of Capitola," he commented.

"Antonelli and Vetterle are both outside the city, and most of the begonias for the festival come from La Selva Beach."

The mayor claims it's a tradition that the begonia is Capitola's flower and that the tradition doesn't depend on how many commercial growers are in the area.

"There will always be begonias grown in this area because the climate is so perfect for it," Walker said. "As the city grows up, naturally there will be fewer places to grow them commercially. But Capitols will continue to grow them in their yards and planter boxes, so the people will carry on the tradition themselves."

There is no question that the Begonia Festival Assn. is concerned about the possible loss of the title. Ron Graves, this year's director, has indicated that the handwriting is on the wall and the festival should start looking about for a new image and theme.

Long-time festival board member Lew Deasy said the group began thinking about a new format for the celebration three years ago when the first hint came that high taxes might force the begonia growers out of the urbanized Capitola area.

He added there even have been suggestions of whole new names for the festival, and the printing of association stationery was held to a minimum this year for that reason.

Still, Deasy wouldn't go so far as to say Capitola's days as the begonia capital are numbered. "I don't think anyplace will be able to replace us, because



One of the three commercial growers of begonias in the Capitola area probably will close his doors soon to make way for a new residential and commercial development. The other two are battling high land assessments, and if they

lose the fight, what happens to Capitola's title of "Begonia Capital of the World?" The Capitola Chamber of Commerce and the Begonia Festival Assn. already are casting about for new themes and images for the community

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