

New owner reveals plans for SC's Cooper House

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The Cooper House, a historic but financially troubled landmark in downtown Santa Cruz, may be on the track once again to becoming the centerpiece of the Pacific Garden Mall.

The building was sold last week to Los Gatos businessman Jay Paul, a real estate developer.

Built in 1894 and originally the courthouse, the Cooper House was redeveloped for retail shops in 1967 when the County Governmental Center took over as the courthouse.

It became a bustling commercial center in the 1970s, but began a downward slide in the '80s. Ownership changed frequently and vacancies went unfilled.

Santa Cruz business leaders worried about the effect the building's decline would have on business, and historical advocates worried about the future of the building if it was not economically viable.

But if Paul's plans go through as he has proposed, business and historical concerns will both be satisfied.

Nance Lee McKendrick, a real estate broker who is acting as spokeswoman for Paul, said Paul has some sophisticated plans for the building.

"He wants to make it a 'Class A' shopping center," McKendrick said. "The color scheme will be more sedate and sophisticated, in keeping with the era of the building. The Cooper House will get away from the touristy sort of shops and have more shops that locals will want to visit."

First, the building will be closed for renovation work. May 5 is the target date for its grand opening under new ownership.

All tenants have been asked to vacate the building until May. McKendrick said most of them will be returning.

The plaza outside the Cooper House will become "less of a place where people sit and drink and more of a family place," she said.

There will be "cart vendors" who will sell food items in the plaza and tables for customers to sit, eat and people-watch. In addition, there will be entertainment, although McKen-

drick said that hasn't been pinned down yet.

Double Rainbow, which runs ice cream and specialty coffee stores in the San Francisco Bay Area, will offer a "broad menu" out of the building's restaurant, she said.

"I'm very pleased this has happened because I feel Paul and the other investors have a sensitivity to old buildings and are aesthetically sophisticated," McKendrick said. "I think they will do a superior job in restoring the building and making it economically viable."

Paul has also made a bid to renovate the old County Jail near the Cooper House, and has plans to tie the jail and the Cooper House together.

Most of his development has been in the San Jose area, but he has also recently proposed the Pajaro Hills Commercial Center in Watsonville.

"I think the Cooper House is going to be a very fun place that will add some sunshine back to that corner of the downtown," McKendrick said. "It's an old building and right now it needs a lot of love."