

Forbus' folly: A flood control scheme that works — sometimes

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Newcomers to Live Oak, a neighborhood which is quickly losing its rural character, have probably never heard of 'Forbus' Folly.' They may wonder what the expansive, fenced-in hole is for at 38th Avenue and Brommer Street.

The basin lies a stone's throw from the Blue and Gold Star Mobile Home Park at 1255 38th Ave.

Its early nickname comes from the efforts of Dan Forbus, county supervisor for Live Oak, to install a good system for draining runoff from the Capitola Mall and development reaching up to Soquel Drive. Increasing amounts of runoff, rolling off growing expanses of blacktop, were overflowing the banks of the drainage channel, or "creek," cutting through the park.

The supervisor recalls the nickname was a good-natured jibe from his fellow supervisors of the time because he worked so hard for its construction.

"I was the pusher that got the money to dig the hole," Forbus said. "Blue and Gold Mobile Home Park was flooding every time it rained heavily."

According to Forbus, the basin, big enough to hold runoff from storms likely to occur in 10-year weather cycles, has saved the mobile home park

from flooding three times since it was built in 1974.

The retention basin comes into play when the channel running through the park is near to overflowing, Carl Rom, of the county public works department, said.

A pipe, 54 inches in diameter, carries water from the channel to the retention basin, Rom said. When the storm recedes the water is pumped back into the channel. Eventually, it flows into Corcoran Lagoon.

Although the basin does the job it was designed for quite well, "It didn't keep it from flooding in '81 and it flooded again in '82," Forbus said.

The basin just wasn't big enough to contain runoff from the once-a-century torrents that hit the county those years.

Those floods are still fresh in the minds of Blue and Gold residents who have high-water marks on their walls, cabinets and curtains and vivid stories of row-boat rescues, to document the disasters.

"Once winter comes, you're always uneasy," said Millie Clemens, who can see the drainage channel from her kitchen window.

Clemens moved in a month before the flood of '81. The inundation ruined flooring and furniture.

"All the mattresses were shot. They were soaking wet. It would take a year to dry out,"

Clemens said. "All the carpeting had to be ripped out. The poor fellow who ripped it out. He almost broke his neck. That (wet carpet) weighs, you know."

The basin seems like a fairly permanent fixture in Live Oak. When it was first put in, county supervisors discussed developing a seasonal park for the dry summer spells at the basin, Forbus said. The City of Capitola, however, annexed the property soon after, and all talks of a park were dropped, Forbus said.

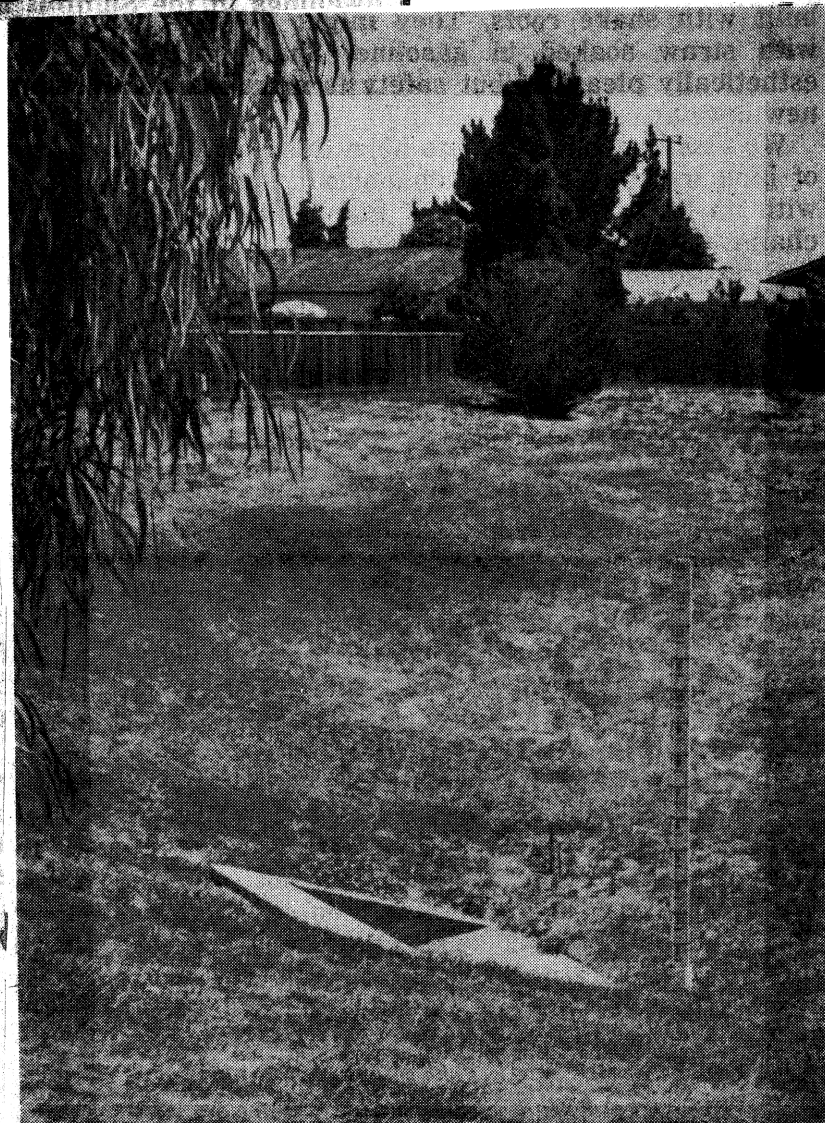
The Capitola Mall and other recent developments in the boom-town area of the county have fed the flooding at Blue and Gold park.

"If that was a big field with cows grazing around the grass there would be a lot less runoff than if there was a mall there," Rom said. "Progress, I suppose."

Expansion of the mall calls for developing a drainage line along Brommer to Rodeo Gulch. The new system, tied to

further development of the mall, would drain some of the runoff now going into the basin and the mobile home park, Rom said.

However, the new drainage system will not have enough capacity to render the retention basin obsolete and "Forbus' Folly" will continue to be a familiar landmark in Live Oak.



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A depth pole marks the height of water during storms