



BRINGING BEAUTY TO A HOSTEL ENVIRONMENT

Historic Houses-Beach Area

Carmelita Court
wants your help
at the historic
Beach Hill site

By TRAVIS SEMMES

Sentinel staff writer

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It's one of the most spectacular city gardens in Santa Cruz.

You've probably never been there. But it needs your help.

Carmelita Cottages, being leased from the city of Santa Cruz by the Santa Cruz Hostelling Society, contain a botanical treasure.

Few people know it, but the hostel's courtyard garden is open to the public as a city park.

But funds are short. Hostel staff members, who are in charge of maintaining the grounds, are trying to recruit volunteers to donate an hour or two of their time working in the gardens.

"I see this place as an unpolished gem," said Ann Stavinoha, president of the hostel's board of directors.

Stavinoha and some other staff members will host a meeting and free pizza dinner Tuesday to get comment from the community and contact those who would like to help pull weeds, prune roses, and do whatever other garden maintenance begs to be





Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: Carmelita Cottages, willed to Santa Cruz by Lottie Thompson Sly as 'a restful place for the public to enjoy,' has a commanding deodara cedar at its entry. **TOP:** a deciduous magnolia blooms above the Beach Hill hostel.

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Meat and vegetarian pizzas will be served.

Jacob Simon, the hostel's assistant manager, describes the place as a "good resource in the community for people coming to visit."

He also said that with staffing issues taken care of, "volunteer necessities are just becoming clear."

Most of the Carmelita Cottages were built in the 1870s by Capt. Joseph Roberts, a sailor and building contractor in Santa Cruz. They comprise some of the oldest structures on Beach Hill.

In 1955, when long-time owner Lottie Thompson Sly died, her handwritten will bequeathed the property to the city.

She stipulated the land be used for "establishing and maintaining a public park," and "for the area to be cleared and properly landscaped, making it a restful place for the public to enjoy."

This was to happen after the residents who were living in the cottages when she died either moved away or died. She didn't want her will to be anyone's eviction notice.

When the last resident died in 1977, Sly's will also demanded the cottages be torn down to create the park she had envisioned. But the buildings were designated historical landmarks, permanently staying their destruction.

History is not lacking on the site. All sorts of stories and legends tell of the folks who made the place their home more than a century ago, in a very different Santa Cruz.

Some people even claim to have seen the ghost of a sailor in one of the cottages.

"They say he was wearing yellow slickers and a big hat and was trying to get through a wall where a door used to be," Stavinocha said as she pointed to a paned

Please see **CARMELITA** on **Page C2**

If you go

What: Dinner meeting for those who wish to volunteer to help maintain Carmelita Court gardens.

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16.

Where: Carmelita Cottages, 315-321 Main St., on Beach Hill between Second and Third streets in Santa Cruz.

Details: Call Ann Stavinocha (Stavinocha) at 689-0263, or e-mail her at info@hi-santacruz.org.

'I see this place as an unpolished gem.'

ANN STAVINOHA, HOSTEL PRESIDENT

Carmelita: Feeling the need to weed? Historic site needs you

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window about the size of a door.

"Supposedly he's the ghost of a sailor who brought back syphilis to the women who lived there" she said. "But I haven't seen him."

In October 1984, the City Council gave the Santa Cruz Hostel Society permission to covert the quaint structures into overnight lodging for world travelers and city visitors.

Today, the leased buildings are locked from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. — forcing their guests into a diurnal lifestyle. And there's an 11 p.m. curfew to prevent sots from rousing the cottage's close neighbors in the middle of the night. There are also no drugs or alcohol allowed on the property.

But the rules are easier to swallow when you hear it only costs \$15-\$18 a night to stay there.

Its close-to-the-beach location, and the fact that it's the only hostel in town, helps fill all 40 beds in the summer.

Unfortunately, it doesn't do much to get the weeds pulled.

An unpolished garden

During daylight hours, anyone can walk through the garden, or find a bench and utilize its "restful" places.

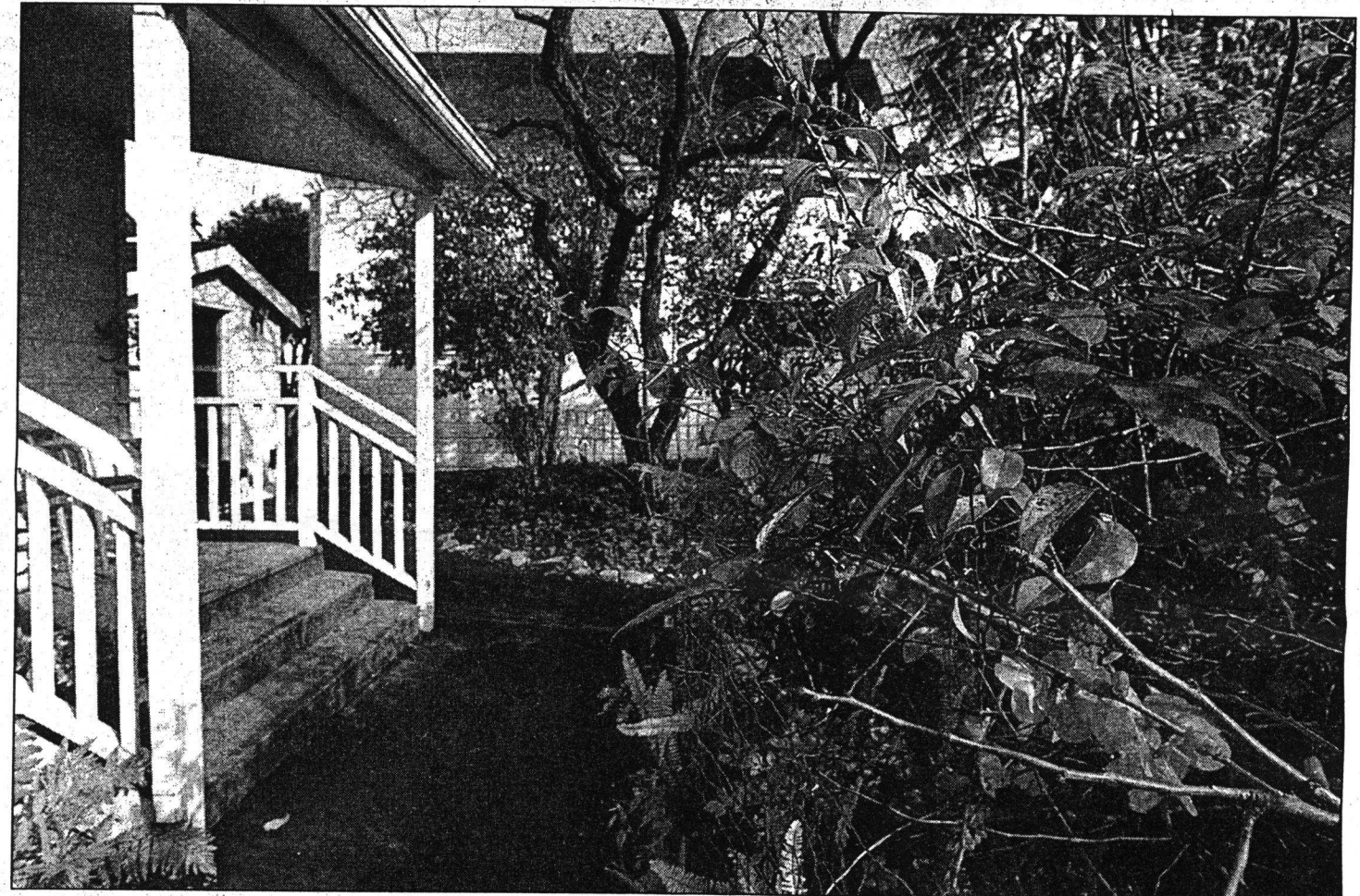
And many of those who know it's a city park do just that.

"I see these surfers, in their wetsuits," said Stavinoha. "They come in and eat their lunch on the benches."

To the surfers, it's probably just a convenient place to relax after hitting the water, but to a seasoned gardener, it's a place to admire botanical beauty — beauty that took a 130 years to reach maturity.

Until recently, Carmelita Court boasted the largest Liquidambar tree in the county. But because of its declining health and breaking limbs, the tree had to be removed.

However, the loss wanes in comparison to the garden's other wonders. For instance, there are camellias, a deciduous magnolia and a dogwood in bloom right now, as well as rhododendrons, azaleas, many different roses, old cypress trees and a huge tulip tree, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, scattered



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Carmelita Cottages on Beach Hill serve as a hostel for world travelers.

throughout the garden.

The most eye-catching specimen is an ancient deodara cedar from the Himalayas. Its bark has worked into softball-sized bumps about 10 feet up. It has also been topped, either by a storm or at the hands of a landscaper, causing it to send up multiple spars off the main trunk. It is truly a marvel to behold.

The garden beds, partitioned off by a spiderweb of brick walkways that connect the cottages, contain mostly flowering shrubs. And in the area where the liquidambar once

stood, a sparsely planted bed is being prepped in expectation of summer sun; something the giant tree previously eclipsed.

Besides the camellias, the magnolia and the dogwood, there's not much in bloom right now. After all, it is winter.

But if you can find it in your heart ¹ and in your Daytimer — to volunteer in the garden, you'll be able to revel in verdant, springtime splendor and know you were a part of the process that continues to make this garden a community treasure.

Some may have had a New Year's resolution to be more active in the community, to volunteer time and energy towards a worthy cause. If you're thinking — yeah, I did say that — there's only one thing you need to do: show up to the pizza dinner party on Tuesday, Jan. 16, at 7 p.m., in the main cottage.

You can also visit the hostel's web page by logging onto www.hi-santacruz.org.

Contact Traves Semmes at tsemmes@santa-cruz.com.