

New shop ties past to future

Business-W SJM
By David L. Beck
Mercury News 8-10-02

Linda Galion, her dark hair tied back and covered with a black cloth, sits at a long table in a former railroad depot fixing a bouquet of dried flowers to a birch-twig heart with wire.

The heart was bent in the spring, when the birch was young and supple, and has been drying for months. The flowers were grown by homeless people at the edge of town, then cut, tied and dried.

A bow of dried grass — a tag that says "Handmade by Linda G." — and the heart is done.

Then it will go into the new shop next door run by the Women's Organic Flower Enterprise in a city-owned building that 50 years ago was a popular drive-in, and five or 10 years from now will be the site of a museum. The shop opened about three weeks ago and has its grand opening today.

What Galion does and where she's doing it tie together a number of city plans and a fair amount of city history. The proposed Depot Site park is intended to tie together the neighborhoods and the Main Beach area, as well as providing parking and other facilities for beachgoers.

See **FLOWERS**, Page 5B

LOCAL SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 2002 SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

FLOWERS | Museum site hosts non-profit shop

Continued from Page 1B

The flower business is a training operation, teaching women both the craft of working with dried flowers and the rudiments of running a small business — and, indeed, the rudiments of going to work, since many of the women have been homeless. (Galion says she never was actually living on the streets.)

"We ask them to address some of the issues that have led them to homelessness in the first place," said Kim Eabry, director of the Women's Organic Flower Enterprise. The enterprise is part of the Homeless Garden Project, a long-running non-profit operation that pays people to raise and sell organic vegetables and flowers.

The farm used to be on Pelton Avenue, across from Lighthouse Field State Beach, but the city, which owned the land, sold it to a developer for upscale houses. The city continues to give it financial support — slightly more than \$11,000 in the current budget.

Now the homeless garden is called Natural Bridges Farm, a three-acre plot at the western edge of Santa Cruz. Developer Barry Swenson has let the non-profit organization use it rent-free since 1998. Eventually the Homeless Garden Project hopes to move to a nine-acre site behind the Pogonip clubhouse — another bit of Santa Cruz history.

Pogonip is a city-owned wild area adjoining the Uni-

versity of California-Santa Cruz. In the early 20th century, it included a polo field. Proposals for a golf course there were jeered at a public meeting more than a decade ago, and since then plans have moved slowly, although there continues to be talk about rehabilitating the Pogonip clubhouse as a public facility.

Jane Petroff, executive director of the Women's Organic Flower Enterprise, said the group has been working on an operations and management plan for the Pogonip farm site.

For now, and for the foreseeable future, the Flower Enterprise works out of a former Union Pacific depot on Washington Street — hence the working name of Depot Site park. The city council approved a master plan and an environmental impact report for the park last month, while the redevelopment agency negotiates for a small triangle of land across Washington Street from the depot.

That triangle and the street itself will make possible a full-size soccer field at the oddly shaped park, which measures 7.67 acres, not all of it usable.

The depot is a historic building. It will be saved and moved elsewhere on the site. Right now the old blue building is where the Flower Enterprise shapes its wreathes, hangs its bouquets to dry, dips its candles and answers its phones.

At the new shop, a small heart-shaped wreath like the

one Galion was making will sell for \$18. The beeswax candles that Dawn Brandberg is dipping — over and over again, until they reach a thickness of five-eighths of an inch — will be wrapped prettily with dried flowers and sold for \$5 a pair.

A large sheaf of dried larkspur, dock, feverfew, santolina, purple oregano, yarrow and salvia, also made by Galion, sells for \$90 at the shop, where the clean smell of dried lavender mingles with the smells of organic produce from the Homeless Garden, fresh-brewed coffee, lemonade and cookies.

All of that is miles removed from the smells of gas and malt liquor in the parking lot of the former Lighthouse Liquors, which in turn was nothing like the smell of the Crossroads Bar-B-Q of 1951 or the Danny's Drive In of the later 1950s, where carhops ferried Cokes and burgers to kids in cars pausing in their cruising.

The Flower Enterprise has an open-ended lease with the city for its new shop. The intention is that it can stay there until the Museum of Natural History, which has been promised that site at the corner of the new park, raises enough money to build. "We'll take it as long as we can get it," said Eabry.

Contact David L. Beck at dbeck@sjmercury.com or at (831) 423-0960.