



Officials warn of cave-in dangers at construction site.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Midnight marauders in quest for long-buried antique bottles

By AMY ZUCKERMAN
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SANTA CRUZ — Under cover of night, antique-bottle burglars armed with shovels and flashlights are stealing glass pieces of Santa Cruz history.

City officials say the thieves are creeping over a fence at the Cedar/Locust parking garage construction site downtown and pilfering pharmacy bottles buried since the turn of the century.

But public works officials and construction personnel say the amateur archaeologists are both breaking the law and running the risk of being buried alive.

"People have dug tunnels in the side of huge piles of dirt that we

haven't excavated," said Chris Schneider, assistant director of the Public Works Department.

"We've found in the morning a couple of collapsed trenches. Thank God no people were in them, because we wouldn't have found them until the morning," Schneider said.

Construction workers have gathered about 50 clear-glass bottles so far. No one knows how many more have been carried out by fence-jumpers.

The bottles are worth about \$10 to \$20 apiece, according to Nikki Silva, exhibits curator for the Santa Cruz County Historic Trust.

Silva said that some of the bottles are embossed with the words

"Santa Cruz" and "Bixby's Pharmacy," which was once located on Pacific Avenue.

The parking garage, due for completion in 10 months, is a \$5.1-million project that is scheduled to provide 417 parking spaces.

Since the ground-breaking ceremony on July 30, enough dirt has been moved around at the site to expose the bottles.

It is unlawful to enter the site, and to remove anything — regardless of its historic value.

"We will prosecute people if we catch them," said Schneider. Violators, he said, would be charged with trespassing and theft.

Public Works has asked the San-

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ta Cruz Police Department to patrol the area more frequently.

"We've also reinforced the fence. But it's really hard to control (the break-ins)," Schneider said.

He said the department is looking into getting a security guard to be present at the site after work hours.

Larry Erwin, director of the Public Works Department, said that he would have to amend the project contract to include the cost of security guards. The cost, said Erwin, would be paid for by city funds.

The bottles which have been recovered by workers are being stored at the site workers' trailer, according to Mike Linn, assistant construction manager on the project.

He added that the trailer has its own security system.

Besides endangering life and raising the project's cost, the collectors are walking away with clues to Santa Cruz history.

But Silva and a young friend are striving to make sure that the bottles' discovery benefits the public. They are working to create a display case for the Vision Santa Cruz center at 1543 Pacific Ave.

Ten-year old Joey Cassidy, the son of the project's contractor, had the original idea to save the bottles

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— Nikki Silva,
Historic Trust

for the public.

"I feel awkward about people scrounging around there," said Silva. "Every time I've gone down there at night I've seen five or six people with flashlights and shovels," she said.

Silva said she and contractor John Cassidy are meeting today at the site to organize the display case. The bottles should be displayed within a few weeks, she said.

"I think it's really important for downtown to put together the pieces of our past, especially as we rebuild and construct the future," she said.