

Sky-high land prices

Industrial Park mushrooming

By ANN CONY

For people who travel Airport Boulevard infrequently, it may be a shock these days to notice the increased development along Hangar Way, the entrance to Freedom Industrial Park. And there'll be plenty more building there in the future, as the park covers some 125 acres.

Years ago much of the land was planted in rows of cabbage, but the earth there is far from prime agricultural turf, according to City Planning Director Bob Ellenwood, who called it "marginal" farmland. Most of it was owned by Frank Alden.

It was in 1969 that the city decided to designate the area for industrial use. (At that time, significant portions of the present industrial park were outside the city limits but have since been annexed.)

The value of land in the industrial park has skyrocketed in the last 10 years. Ellenwood can recall an acre there typically selling for \$9,000 or so in 1970.

Now, the fair market value of an acre is said by some to be \$100,000 or more. Furthermore, word has it that no parcels remain for sale, although many are up for lease.

The industrial park area (roughly bounded by Airport Boulevard, Larkin Valley Road, Holm Road and Hangar Way) was seen by city officials as a good location to serve a variety of purposes.

Zoned to accommodate light industrial and commercial uses, it was considered a sufficiently open spread of land in which to organize an industrial complex for small, clean industrial uses. It had the added benefit of being able to serve as a "buffer" area between the airport and neighboring residential areas.

Several of the industrialists interviewed indicated they were attracted to their present location because Watsonville is one of the few Central Coast cities that is not "anti-business."

It was likely to attract businesses, the city reasoned because of its proximity to the freeway and the airport.

"It's a very flexible area," Ellenwood said, explaining that a business can occupy a small portion of a building or a multi-acre site.

Although the park could fill up in a matter of just a few years, "it all depends on how strong the market is," Ellenwood said.

An assessment district has been formed to further develop the area with streets, sewers, storm drains and the like. Ellenwood hopes that work will be completed within a year.

Although the existing buildings in the park are reportedly "up to code" and have met the city's building criteria, Ellenwood isn't altogether happy with some of the buildings.

The city envisioned a nice-looking industrial park but there are a few "ugly-looking metal buildings," said Ellenwood. "That wasn't what we had in mind at all."

But the planning director expects that the city will have more leverage over what goes in the park after a design review ordinance is passed, which is expected to happen soon. "We want the quality of the buildings and the landscaping to be continually upgraded," he said. With the advent of a design review committee it is assumed that potential projects would come under more esthetic scrutiny than in the past.

There are some 20 businesses already settled in the industrial park, some having large offices and other occupying garage-type areas or combination warehouse/office space.

Entrepreneurs interviewed in the last few weeks gave numerous explanations for the desirability of the industrial park location, including easy freeway access, reasonable rent, a semi-rural atmosphere and a United Parcel Service operation within the confines of the park.

A number of people said they preferred this location to others in the area because they envision Watsonville becoming the hub of commerce and industry around Monterey Bay, while others prefer the location now because the outskirts of Watsonville are still relatively open.

"Watsonville is a far away, quiet place. It's less hectic" than other areas, said Mike Delian, who runs a one-man electronics shop.

Lorna Hazelton, a partner in a natural foods wholesale business, explained why she is in the industrial park: "We looked in Santa Cruz and there just wasn't anything available." Although "We used to hate Watsonville, we like it more and more now."

One business owner said the industrial park is a choice location because, among other reasons, "industrial insurance won't touch you in a lot of other places."

Businesses occupying space in the industrial park include:

—**Pacific Telephone:** moved its installation and maintenance crew to new offices on Hangar Way last November. They were formerly located on Chappell Road.

—**United Parcel Service:** receives packages from 9 a.m. until noon Monday through Friday and plans to "grow with the community of Watsonville," said Jim Nobles, a Santa Cruz-based supervisor.

—**Coast Office Supply:** latest addition to the park, it opened at 7 Hangar Way last week, sporting a 2,200-square-foot showroom. Michael J. Carini owns and runs the business with his brother, Gary. Coast Office moved its headquarters from Santa Cruz to Watsonville, where there are seven employees. Carini boasts the largest furniture showroom in the county and does business here, in Santa Cruz, Gilroy, Hollister and Morgan Hill. Although the company handles bid accounts with the local school district, municipalities and other large entities, about two-thirds of its business is in supplies such as paperclips and pencils.

—**Tri-Arc:** statewide wholesalers of domestic and imported ceramic tile. The firm, owned by Herbert H. Myers of Aptos, employs seven people in Watsonville, its headquarters, and has offices in Anaheim, Van Nuys, Sacramento and San Jose. In Santa Cruz County, it specializes in tile for custom residential work.

—**Rounds, Logan and Blas Accounting:** accounting firm employing 13 people. Jack Rounds and Michael Blas formerly did business at 141 Monte Vista and needed more room when they were joined by John Logan, who had offices in Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

—**Madden Business Machines:** sells and services copying machines, employing about 20 people in its Hangar Way headquarters. Owned by Fred Pieper of Aptos, the company, which has a second office in Santa Clara, moved to Watsonville from Santa Cruz a year ago.

—**Pacific Coast Circuits:** manufactures electronic circuit boards. Owned by Dick Brown, Roger Adams and Eugene Zeissler, the company employs 10 people and moved to Hangar Way a year ago.

—**Precision Associates:** a one-man operation manufacturing electronic circuit boards. Owner/operator Mike Delian of Watsonville moved here from Santa Clara a year-and-a-half ago.

—**Shasta Scientific Glass Apparatus:** manufactures industrial glassware for use in electronic and medical fields, with a majority of sales in Santa Clara County. Owned by H.A. Meneses of Capitola, Meneses and sons Bruce and Steve moved their business here from Redding about a year ago. The firm provides jobs for five people.

—**SE Marine and Signal Engineering:** manufactures CB antennas and also sells sailboats. Owned by Greg Johnson of Aptos, the three-person business moved to Hangar Way from Freedom Boulevard a year ago.

—**Hydrex Pest Control Co.:** servicing Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties. Owned by Dan O'Connor of Santa Barbara, the location of the company's main offices, the firm employs six people in Watsonville.



Dan Lang of Bay City Fabricators working in his shop.



Tri-Arc has spacious offices in industrial park.

—**Resurrection Connection Furniture Restoration:** owned and operated by Wes Morford, who returned to his hometown three months ago after living and working in Lake Tahoe.

One of the businesses planning to submit building permit applications as soon as the city gets streets, sewers and the like under construction is **Cathedralite Domes**, the Aptos-based firm that manufactures and markets kits for constructing geodesic dome homes.

Cathedralite has a 10-acre parcel and plans to use two or so acres for a new headquarters, where 35 people will work. The company has plans drawn for three inter-connecting dome structures that will cover 10,000 square feet.

—**Exotic Machines:** automotive repair shop specializing in foreign cars. Owned and operated by Russ Swingford, the business opened last summer.

—**Natural Foods Express:** wholesaler of natural foods, particularly yogurt, juices and cheeses. The Hangar Way operation employs four people and is run by Bruce and Lorna Hazelton, who have partners doing the same thing in San Rafael. The business moved to Watsonville in the fall of 1978.

—**Freedom Crystal Lab:** manufacturers of quartz crystals for computers. A family operation involving five people, owner Loran McGraw moved to Watsonville from Santa Monica a few months ago.

—**Bay Cities Fabricators:** a father-son business doing welding and steel fabrication. Ray Lang and his son Dan moved the business to Hangar Way in September from Beach Road. Much of their work is in equipment for mushroom plants.

—**Maskell-Robbins, Inc.:** a one-man independent distributorship marketing, joining and distributing Phillips 66 polyethylene pipe. Ed Moore has been in business on Hangar Way since last summer.



Kathy Hicks works as a technician at Freedom Crystal Lab.

— R-P staff photos by Sam Vestal