

# A History of El Rio Land 1921 to 1991

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1921

## Ten Acre El Rio Auto Camp Fills Big Need

(By A. A. Taylor)

W. E. Coats deserves great credit for providing Santa Cruz what was really an urgent need—commodious and convenient auto-camp grounds.

The automobile has come upon us with such velocity and violence, so to speak, that few realize the stupendous proportions of the auto-transit traffic.

During the first six months of the year 1920, there were 62,000 automobiles registered in California from other states, and this year the number is likely to be larger.

These figures take no account of the people of this state who are en masse in motion during their spare time, and many times when time ought not be spared.

What share of these people, en tour came to Santa Cruz?

Perhaps a fraction of one per cent—for two reasons. Lack of adequate advertising and lack of auto-camp accommodations.

For this last lack Mr. Coats has rendered "first aid." His modest announcement reads:

"10 acres, beautifully wooded, along west bank of the San Lorenzo River, only two blocks north of post office.

"Fishing, bathing, boating, children's playground. Electric lights, city water, modern, sanitary comfort stations."

Very good, but no words can convey the charm of that river bank which extends for nearly a thousand yards, wooded with willows and alders, and sycamores, an ever present sunshade.

No words can picture that placid and picturesque stream, safe for wading, and swimming and boating. Nature did not forget a "swimming hole" five feet deep under overarching boughs, but for the greater part of the distance it is shallow enough for wading.

It is not unusual to catch "the limit" of trout within the space of El Rio Camp.

The site chosen by Mr. Coats has seclusion and scenery, and what is more important, the sub-soil is gravel, which signifies absence of dampness, an automatic ever-present drainage. There are accommodations for 500 autos (which is but a stopgap for the not distant demand.)

By as great a ratio as the carrying capacity of the railroad surpassed the stage coach, will the automobile exceed the railroad in its transportation facilities.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13, 1921

## IMPROVEMENTS MADE AT EL RIO PARK

With the completion of work on River street, attention will now be paid to McKinley street, leading to El Rio, the new auto camp ground site designed and originated by W. E. Coats. The roadway, only a short one, has already been leveled, and as soon as rolled and topped with rock screenings will add one more improvement to that section of the Potrero district. The fencing around the park, including that on the River street extension side, is in place, and gives a good idea of the large amount of space available for parking and camping sites. The interior of the park, when leveled and the unnecessary trees and underbrush removed, and otherwise put in shape as planned will give Santa Cruz another valuable asset and prove a direct financial gain to business interests.

WERNESDAY, MAY 11, 1921

## PLEASURE BOATING ON SAN LORENZO

W. E. Coats of the El Rio auto camp grounds is planning to make boating one of the features in connection with the large pool of still water that forms part of the boundary line of the park, and which extends for a distance of several hundred yards. A number of flat-bottom pleasure boats are being overhauled for boating purposes, and will be ready for launching shortly. The lake is pretty deep in places and will afford campers a chance to enjoy bathing without going to the beach. When trout begin to come down stream this pool of water becomes a rendezvous for them and provides exceptionally good fishing at times.

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1921

## EL RIO AUTO CAMP, Santa Cruz--State's best equipped park



Scene in California's newest and best 10-acre auto park, showing portion of the 2000 foot frontage and shade trees along the San Lorenzo River.

### Comforts and Features Best in the West--Every Desire Satisfied--Attendant on Duty

Wood and gas for cooking—sanitary toilets and lavatories connected with city sewer—electric lights—children's playground with sand bin and swing—tables, seats, garbage cans—water hydrants every hundred feet—battery station, garage, oil and gas service only one block—no poison oak, snakes or fleas—beautiful grove along entire half-mile river frontage—grounds enclosed on three sides with eight-foot board fence, affording protection and seclusion—fine sand beach and clean sandy bottom—shallow water for children's amusement.  
OFFICE AND INFORMATION BUREAU AT ENTRANCE

The public is invited to the opening of the camp ground tomorrow

ENTRANCE FEE 50c. per car per day or \$2.50 per week, which includes free light, water and plumbing.  
TENTS for rent \$12 feet at 50c per day or \$2.50 per week.

WOOD, sawed and split, ready for use, 15c per sack.  
GAS PLATES 2 burner on 25c meters, individual booths.  
BOATING SAFE, flat bottom 16-foot boats for rent, 25c per hour.

## EL RIO AUTO PARK AND OTHER AUTO CAMPS OF SANTA CRUZ

Just one year ago beautiful El Rio Auto Camp, located at the end of McKisby street and one block from the main business street of Santa Cruz, was opened to the public by W. E. Coats, the owner, who has invested \$28,000 in this enterprise.

Mr. Coats told a News man this week that his business this year has such a promising outlook that twenty platform tents will be added to his housing facility as well as 42 individual gas heaters and numerous other improvements are under way.

El Rio Auto Camp consists of ten acres, beautifully wooded, stretching along the west bank of the San Lorenzo river, only two blocks north of the post office. Electric lights, city water, modern, sanitary comfort stations and ample facilities for cooking with gas makes this one of the best equipped and most modern auto camp grounds in the state.

A. A. Taylor, a local newspaper editor, in his writings has described the camp as follows:

"No words can convey the charms of that river bank which extends for nearly a thousand yards, wooded with willows and alders, and sycamores, an ever present shade."

"No words can picture that placid and picturesque stream, safe for wading, and swimming and boating. Nature did not forget a 'swimming hole' five feet deep under over reaching boughs, but for the greater part of the distance it is shallow enough for wading."

"It is not unusual to catch 'the limit' of trout within the space of El Rio Camp."

"The site chosen by Mr. Coats has excellent and scenery, and what is more important, the soil is gravel, which signifies absence of dampness, an excellent ever-present drainage. There are accommodations for 500 autos (which is but a stop-gap for the not distant demand)."

"By its great ratio as the carrying capacity of the railroad surpassed the stage coach, will the automobile exceed the railroad in its transportation facilities."

Booths, Ibel Grove, Fridleys and the Felton Auto Camp grounds are also to be counted among the splendid camps of this county for the accommodation of autoists and tourists.

Booth's Grove Auto Camp lies practically in the heart of the city and Ibel Grove is located on the edge of the city limits on a running stream in the heart of 150 acres of natural forest.

Fridley's Auto Camp is located on the Big Tree drive on the San Lorenzo river in the famous Sycamore Flat section, which is surrounded with enormous sycamores.

The Felton Auto Camp ground is located near the historic town of Felton on the highway and is modern in every respect.

## EL RIO AUTO CAMP IN MIDST OF BUILDING PROGRAM OF TWENTY-FIVE COTTAGES WHICH WILL BE READY FOR SUMMER TOURIST RUSH

Carrying the co-operative idea a little farther than most business



The Original Food-Drink for All Ages. Quick Lunches Home, Office & Pountains. Rich Milk, Malted Grain Extract in Powder & Tablet forms. Nourishing—No cooking. **Avoid Imitations and Substitutes**



Mr. Santa Cruz Citizen: Our advertising is designed to pull for you "All the Year." Will you pull for us in return? When you write the folks back east, mention the best auto camp in California—that's all! We thank you.

men are wont to do, W. E. Coats, proprietor of El Rio Auto camp is in the midst of a piece of development work of importance and which is unique in conception of its details.

Co-operative advertising is the basic principle which has been applied in the construction of twenty-five cottages, nine of which are completed and work upon the remainder of which is progressing at a lively rate in order to have them ready for the summer business.

Mr. Coats has arranged to date for a Hupp, a Reo, Packard, Ford, Cadillac, Buick, Studebaker, Chandler and a Cleveland cottage. His idea is to name a cottage for each make of car, to place the name of the cottage conspicuously, together with the name of the dealer who handles that car in Santa Cruz. In return he is permitted to place his own advertising signs in the garage of those dealers who have cottages named for their cars.

Thirty tents and numbers of open-air kitchens supplement the cottages, gas plates being available for all.

The advertising of El Rio Auto camp is a red heart with plain lettering, which while it presents the camp as the best in the state is so worded as to pull for the whole city.

### Creating Real Park

Mr. Coats believes that the best

advertisement of all for Santa Cruz is that of perfect accommodations. His cottages are planned for comfort, built tight, with easily adjusted ventilators, screens, gas on quarter meters, water within easy reach, comfort stations fitted with shower baths and bath tubs, an office building so situated that incoming cars are registered before they reach the gates, information service that is authentic, well defined drives, everything systemized and yet not made a hardship to guests and the fourteen acre camp rapidly growing into a garden spot, because of the constant plantings of flowers, trees and shrubs.

Along a half mile of river front at one of the most beautiful spots on the San Lorenzo and where the water is pure and clean lies El Rio Auto camp. Six boats are kept for the use of travelers. A swimming pool lies convenient to the center of the camp. Trees are sufficient for shade and ornamentation but undergrowth is kept cut away.

Mr. Coats is planting thornless blackberry hedges along the drives and will add Isabella and Mission grapes, the fruit of which will be free to the tourists. He keeps a large supply of flower seed on hand and beds of flowers will provide blooms for the whole year. He is planting white and black walnuts, madrone, redwood, pine, eucalyptus and other trees, using Spanish broom for the borders of some of his drives, in fact creating a park which is a garden and a garden surrounding accommodations for three hundred cars daily.

### Important to City

Mr. Coats feels he is doing his share to make Santa Cruz prosper. Out along the highways his huge red heart signs urge Santa Cruz as the place for the tourist to find enjoyment. He is co-operating in every detail possible with the city as a whole and is proud of the fact that his customers carry the message of Santa Cruz throughout the tourist territory.

To provide the one item of water for this huge outdoor hotel more than a mile of pipe has been used and hydrants are found all over the tract.

He says nothing of the amounts of money which he has expended and is expending in building El Rio. When he speaks of anything in connection with his camp it is always something concerning his vision of the future and what he will add from time to time to bring more people to Santa Cruz.

Mr. Coats welcomes local visitors, but has established a rule that they must make use of Sunday as the day when their visits are paid.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1925

## El Rio Auto Camp Has Facilities of Every Description

Few auto camps can boast the equipment of the El Rio on River street extension and lying close to the San Lorenzo. Electric lights, gas, plenty of water at each camp-site, shower and tub baths, boating, swimming, well appointed dressing rooms, shrub bordered walks, neat and well-furnished cottages for those who desire them,—these are the facilities for enjoyment which have made the name EL RIO one to be handed from tourist to tourist on the long trails leading from the east.

W. E. Coats is a stickler for cleanliness and El Rio is kept in apple pie order at all times. Local residents enjoy many an outing in this camp.

## THE IDEAL PLACE



Three blocks from Post office on the road to the Big Trees.



## El Rio Camp Calls Fiction Stories To Mind of Newswriter

Registrations at the El Rio Auto Camp for the month of August showed a steady gain over the previous months of the summer. Many guests of last year have appeared to claim a share of the hospitality of the camp and in every case have many compliments to pay Manager Coats upon the many improvements in accommodation and service which they note.

The recent addition to the camp has had many tenants during the past fortnight, although it was scarcely ready for use as Mr. Coats had not finished its various appointments.

A drive through the camp during the evening hour arouses the enthusiasm of the local visitor as he has before him all the quaint scenes which have been painted so vividly by fiction writers during the past few years.

There is the campfire scene, the middle-aged and elderly men pitching horseshoes, the children paddling about in the shallows of the river, the happy lovers drifting in a boat on the river. As the visitor makes the rounds of the camp all the stories he has read of life in auto camps comes back to him and he feels a surge of the wanderlust which could be satisfied only by life for a time in camps such as El Rio,

## BATHING FACILITIES APPEAL TO WOMAN FROM EASTERN STATE

Commenting recently upon accommodations to be had at El Rio auto camp a woman from an eastern state said that the camp offers all the joys of living outdoors with all the conveniences of city life. She was especially pleased with the fact that the camp provides bathing facilities, both tub and shower. These facilities are not in the makeshift class but are standard throughout. It has been the ambition of the pro-

prietor, W. E. Coats, since he first began laying out El Rio to make it the finest camp in the United States and each year sees the dream nearer realization.

One of the big features at El Rio is the ample room which is provided, not alone for the individual camp site, but for amusements of all kinds. The camp covers fourteen acres along the San Lorenzo river, is wooded to just such an extent as is necessary for shade, and has been beautified by the addition of ornamental shrubs and vines.

### THE IDEAL PLACE



Three blocks from Post office on the road to the Big Trees.

## FISH SCARCE IN THE RIVER

While steelhead were seemingly numerous in the El Rio park dredger hole yesterday, only a few were caught around the noon hour when the gravel shovel was not working and causing a general disturbance in the big hole, as well as making the water extremely muddy.

With dredger operations at a standstill tomorrow, the fishermen ought to experience better luck, providing the steelhead now in the hole do not take a notion to go up stream. Many steelhead have already made their way to the spawning grounds, but the last rain brought in a new run from the bay.

At low tide yesterday afternoon the steelhead frequently came close to the surface and some of them were big fellows.

Taken as a whole the present week has been a poor one and not many fish have been taken in either the San Lorenzo or Soquel creek. Similar conditions have prevailed in all the coast streams, including the Waddell, a favorite stream for Santa Cruz fishermen.

Cured spawn continues to be the favorite bait for fishermen.

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TUESDAY, JULY 17, 1934

### THAT JETER WEEP- ING WILLOW TREE

The following note from W. E. Coates explains itself:

Riptide and Undertow: Mrs. W. T. Jeter, with friends from Los Angeles, called at El Rio Auto camp to see the "Jerusalem Weeping Willow Trees" you wrote about recently in your column. We learned that the start of these trees was grown from a twig planted by the late W. T. Jeter. The original slip was presented to Mr. Jeter by Judge Kirby S. Mahon, for 20 years superior judge of Sutter county and a resident of Yuba City. The judge took a twig from one of the weeping willow trees of Jerusalem. The trees at El Rio are from the Jeter tree. Best Regards,  
W. E. COATES.

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1943

## New Motel Planned By Buyer Of El Rio Court

By The Associated Press

The seventh major real estate transaction of the month here was announced yesterday with the purchase of the 15-acre El Rio auto court by Daniel G. Becknell of Alameda from W. E. Coates. The purchase price was not revealed.

The El Rio camp ground is the largest in the city, totaling 15 acres of property along the San Lorenzo river near McKinley street.

Becknell announced he will clean up the grounds with a view to building a modern motel as soon as material is available. The camp ground was started by Coates in 1921.

January 18, 1947

COMPLETE TRAVELING OUT-  
fit, eastern made, 3 room house  
trailer, 1946 model and Oldsmobile  
8, 2 door coach, El Rio  
Auto Court, space 45.  
8-1-16-16\*

## PICNIC

Sunday, Sept. 26, 1937

### EL RIO AUTO COURT

Two blocks north of Postoffice

Sponsored by

American Security League

Come and look into an easy and  
logical way to pay every Califor-  
nia citizen over 60 years of AGE  
\$100.00 PER MONTH.

#### EVERYTHING FINE

Bring your lunch and coffee  
trimmings — coffee furnished.  
Program and good speakers.  
Horseshoes and Shuffleboard.  
Children's play ground. Come  
early and enjoy the day.

Wednesday, October 23, 1946

HOUSE TRAILER; 1945 GYPSY  
Caravan, 20 ft. butane stove  
and heater, sleeps 4. Good condi-  
tion, El Rio Auto Court. Space  
No. 12. 8-10-16-251\*

Saturday, November 16, 1946

## Dan Becknell Sells El Rio Auto Court To Canary Brothers Of San Francisco

Dan G. Becknell, who has operated El Rio auto court at the north end of Pacific avenue for the past three years, said Thursday that he has sold the courts to Paul and Gerald Canary, two brothers from San Francisco.

The court contains 20 cabin sites and facilities for 45 house trailers, Becknell said.

The Canary brothers intend to enlarge the trailer accommodations as soon as possible and enlarge the court further when building materials are available.

Paul Canary recently disposed of a beef cattle ranch at Half Moon Bay which he and his brother had been operating. Before that, Paul

Canary spent 22 years in the grocery business, both here and in San Francisco. It was during 1928 that he was employed here at a Skaggs store, later taken over by the Safeway interests.

Gerald Canary served three years in the marine corps before World war II, and during the war was a member of the merchant marine.

Mr. and Mrs. Becknell, themselves owners of a trailer, plan to make an extended trip through the south during the winter months, returning to Santa Cruz via New England and the northern route sometime during the late summer of next year, he told the Sentinel-News.

## El Rio Auto-Trailer Court Fetes New Hall

Over 100 persons celebrated the opening of a new recreation building at the El Rio Auto and Trailer court, 2120 North Pacific avenue, at dedication ceremonies held by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Canary.

A turkey dinner opened the celebration, which was emceed by Frank Morath. The Lord's Prayer, sung by Mrs. Joseph Hall, and the invocation, given by Mrs. Birdie Johnston, preceded the dinner.

Special guests at the event were Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Klein, folk and square dance experts, who gave dance instruction and performed several exhibition numbers.

A guest book signed by the group for future use in the hall was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Canary by Morath. The dedication poem was written by Mrs. Alice Schmoekel.

Besides a dance floor, the hall boasts a television set and numerous chairs. The guests contributed toward a fund to buy card tables for the hall.

General chairman for the event was Mrs. Edmund Wells, assisted by Mrs. Hall, entertainment, and Mrs. Schmoekel and Mrs. Mable Porter, guest book.

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## 12—Santa Cruz Sentinel-News Friday, December 23, 1954

### Trailer Park Residents Are Caught In Trap

By Skip Littlefield

Caught like rats in a trap were the trailer residents of the ill-fated El Rio auto park.

Approximately 150 people were caught unawares as water began surging through the densely jam-packed park at 11 o'clock last night. A large percentage of the residents were middle-aged and elderly — many unable to move without assistance.

Ambulances rescued several bedridden residents at 11:10 o'clock when water had reached a depth of two feet. Within the next half hour the main sector of the park was under five feet of water.

At midnight all communication with the park was lost. Heroic rescue operations were carried on by a handful laboring in utter darkness. Cries and shouts for help resounded from partially submerged trailers.

Elderly residents supporting one another — some clad only in sleeping apparel — bravely fought their way through surging currents from five to six feet deep in attempts to reach higher ground.

At 12 o'clock the writer was unable to proceed further afoot in the park. It is estimated that not more than three trailers got out of the area. Seemingly the residents were lulled into a sense of security by earth embankments flanking the west side of the river.

A watchman at the park as late as 10 o'clock was still assuring residents that "nothing could possibly happen — I have lived here five years and know."

Santa Cruz Sentinel-News

Sunday, January 15, 1956

### Former El Rio Court Residents Wonder Where They Will Live

A lone note calls lily bob-sadly in the breeze amidst the debris and wreckage of the El Rio motor court. This traditional funeral flower stands as a solitary mourner for a happy community which will probably never be the same again.

Just four weeks ago, the 97 trailers that stood in the court were busy with preparations for a happy holiday, as the old people who lived there planned a gay Christmas with their new-found friends and neighbors. The lawns were trimmed and edged, the trailers shining.

All that is gone, and even the efforts of Red Cross disaster workers and Red Cross rehabilitation awards for the replacement of the trailer homes and their contents will never bring back the joy and gentleness with which the residents of El Rio were living out the autumn of their lives.

Yesterday, Red Cross disaster case worker Sally Bailey of Dearborn, Mich., told one ex-resident of El Rio that the local Santa Cruz disaster advisory committee had approved the recommended award of more than \$4500 to replace her trailer and furnishings. The woman choked up, then smiled sadly and said, "I'm so relieved. I wondered if I'd have a home again."

She is gray-haired Mrs. Bernice Cauby, a native of Indiana, who lived most of her life in Los Angeles before finally settling in Santa Cruz. Her bright blue eyes belie her 63 years, but her care-worn face tells of a life that has had its share of troubles.

On the Tuesday before Christmas, Mrs. Cauby, a widow for three years, finished edging her pretty lawn and decorating her chrome, pink-trimmed trailer. The green picket fence along the path

to her home made an inviting path through geraniums, hens and chickens and luchsia.

Just two nights later, the rising waters of the San Lorenzo river met the tides of the Pacific ocean in Santa Cruz and Mrs. Cauby had the most frightening night of her life. She was rescued by boat but had to stay in the boat for three hours because the current was too swift to try landing. Before her eyes, her trailer rose up from its foundation, turned on its side and washed down towards the sea. The last memory she has of the happy life she had there is the terrifying noise of the metal walls tearing to pieces as the trailer ground and twisted against a bridge downstream.

Today a few blades of her neatly trimmed grass protrude through the silt and mud. The whole six and a half-acre trailer park is littered with canned goods, clothing, suitcases, old-fashioned hats, diaries, souvenir programs, photographs and the memorabilia of old age. The storage cabins, recreation hall and rest rooms are tossed helters-skelter in a mucky mess.

Mrs. Cauby lived at the river's edge. She is one of 50 people whose rehabilitation awards were approved by the Red Cross advisory committee Friday night. All told, some 600 Santa Cruz area families will receive Red Cross assistance.

Where she will go now, she does not know. Paul Canary, who owns the El Rio, is glad that the Red Cross is helping the folks who used to live there, but he wonders if the "happy town" he created will ever rise again.

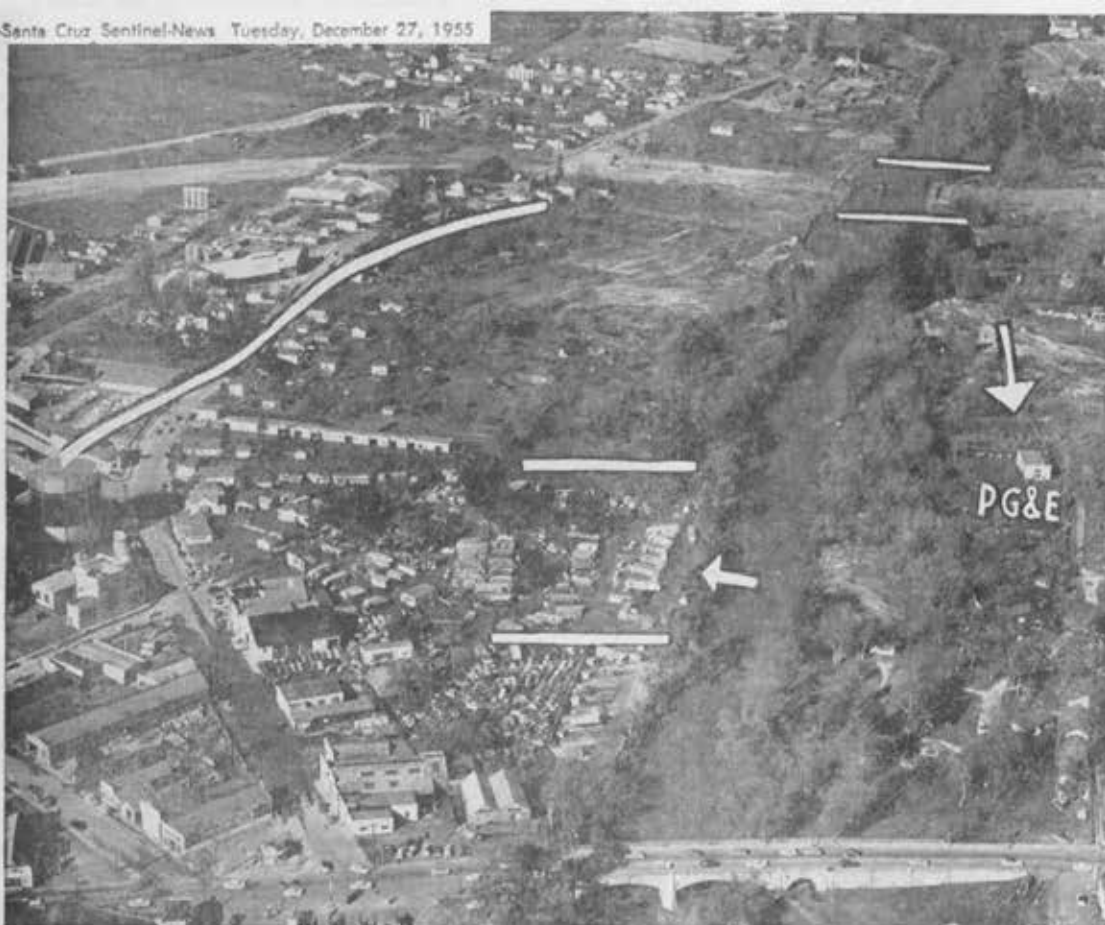
He surveys the wreckage of water and gas lines and the remnants of the happy life he tried to build for his tenants, and his eyes tell the answer. He has registered with Red Cross for assistance, but even he doesn't know what he is going to do next.

"Twenty of them have said they are ready to move back when their trailers are fixed, but I don't know if they will," he says. "They are just too scared, and I can't blame them."

Meanwhile, the Red Cross disaster headquarters in the civic auditorium in Santa Cruz has become the new center of life for the old folks from El Rio. Because they have been scattered to new sites, hotels, motels and other temporary homes, they have lost track of one another, and only at the Red Cross can they be sure that eventually their friends will turn up.

They drop in to see Sally Bailey.

"I guess they just want to see a friendly face. They seem to feel that the Red Cross is the best friend they've got right now," she said.



The Water street bridge in the foreground was a focal point of attention during the disastrous "Christmas Flood" here December 22-23. The arrow in the middle between the parallel lines shows trailers in the devastated El Rio auto court. At the far right is the once-pow-

erful Blaine street PG&E substation. The parallel lines at the top show the proposed business district by-pass crossing of the San Lorenzo while the white line at the top left of the picture gives an indication of the path of the flood waters.

Thursday, April 3, 1958



An unidentified couple at the El Rio mobile home park on north Pacific avenue, which was severely hit in the disastrous 1955 Christmas flood, check the plight of their home when the water broke over the San Lorenzo river bank yesterday

afternoon and gushed into the trailer court. Some 25 trailers were safely hauled to higher ground by civil defense workers.



## Wall Of License Plates



Paul Canary, foreground, holds two 1924 California license plates — the one with the star is a police plate — found when

he and George Lee, in window, were tearing down an old cabin to make more trailer space in the El Rio Trailer court, 2120 North Pacific avenue. The plates were among many others, some as far back as 1914, apparently used to cover cracks when the building was remodeled some 30 years ago. The cabin, which is more than 50 years old, was the home of William E. Coats, owner of a camping site at that location. There were originally 50 cabins like this one in that area.

### QUEEN TO LOSE CHERISHED PRIVACY

London (AP)—Queen Elizabeth II and her family are about to lose some of their cherished privacy. A towering hotel going up soon in Park Lane will look down over the high walls of the Buckingham Palace gardens.

Sunday, Sept. 19, 1965

\$1125. Paramount 8x37. Recently painted, new awnings, drapes, cabana. Sp. 10 (available) El Rio Mobile Park. 426-7163. 45-9-19-226\*

Wednesday, Dec. 18, 1963

## El Rio Park Residents Gather For Yule Dinner

Eighty residents of the El Rio Mobile Homes park gathered last night in the park recreation hall for a holiday dinner.

Hosts were the park owners, Mrs. and Mrs. Paul Canary, with the Weldon Tindalls preparing the ham dinner. Members exchanged gifts and completed the evening by singing carols, led by Mrs. John Burmeister.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 25, 1971

## It's A Cold 'Turkey Day' At El Rio Mobile Home Park

Thanksgiving 1971 has been a lot of cold turkey for resident of the El Rio Mobile Home Park, 2120 North Pacific Ave.

A back hoe struck a gas line Wednesday at 3 p.m. to begin what has become a chilly holiday.

PG&E and city firemen were called to the scene and the break was corrected.

However, upon checking further, it was found that 20 cubic feet of gas was leaking from the line at another source, after the original break had been repaired.

"We can smell the gas, but we can't find the break," said park manager Mrs. Jane Hepfler today. She said work crews searched until 4 o'clock this morning to find the gas leak, and started up again today.

She said PG&E officials told her a "sniffer," a piece of equipment, is needed to locate the leak, but it is in San Jose and the person who operates it can't be located.

The next suggestion was to contact a plumber and have him "pack the pipeline so other lines can be used."

Mrs. Hepfler called all morning to locate a plumber and at presstime had located George Allen in Scotts Valley, who said

he was coming in to lend a hand. But through it all, the spirit of Thanksgiving has prevailed.

Mrs. Hepfler said only eight of the 86 units at the park are receiving gas, and those mobile

home owners have agreed to allow their facilities to be used so other can enjoy the turkey feast.

One woman allowed her lady neighbor to come to her mobile

(Continued on Page 2)

## It's A Cold Turkey Day

(Continued from Page 1)

home and use an electric blanket. Temperatures dipped in to the 40s Wednesday night, but blankets and floor heaters were generously loaned to make the situation a little less severe.

Said a tired Mrs. Hepfler, "Some discomfort for a time is better than a more serious situation such as happened on the hill," referring to the recent fire caused by a gas line break on Highland Avenue that completely destroyed a house. "Maybe we have something to be thankful for today after all."

# New SC Redevelopment Project Is Proposed

BY BILL NEUBAUER  
Sentinel Staff Writer

A multimillion dollar project that would convert the northwest sector of the downtown area into a primary commercial - tourist - residential complex was proposed Monday to the city redevelopment commission by Cole Reed Associates, a development syndicate that includes 22 partners.

The complex would include, if all went well, three department stores, specialty shops, a supermarket, a drugstore, a convention center, a hotel, condominium apartments, a mall, and a design that would permit service by mass transportation facilities to cut down reliance upon the private automobile.

Company spokesman Peter Gunn told the commissioners that the company owns the El Rio Mobile Home Park on North Pacific Avenue and that this would be included in the project following relocation of residents to other quarters.

Gunn called for a renewal area of around 90 acres that would go from the river to Water Street, up to Mission and Chestnut and then swing right up the freeway and back to the river.

The project would encompass some 55 acres of development of which the company controls about 15. Gunn said that if arrangements are concluded satisfactorily with Charles Scherer for use of eight acres owned by him and with the state for use of other acreage, then the company would control about 30 of the 55 acres needed.

Gunn noted that his group

would work with Les Ley of the Santa Cruz Lumber Co. for use of their land, with Thomas Butler for use of land atop Mission Hill and down along River Street, with the Wilson firm and with Leland Zeidler for other lands in the area.

But on a direct question Gunn said none of these landowners is included in the project and that he was speaking purely for Cole Reed Associates.

Gunn noted that the city is losing major commercial business to the 41st Avenue shopping complex and contended that with the cooperation of the city in an urban renewal program, Santa Cruz could develop a vast project to boost income and jobs tremendously. He said several times he believes the city can support the project and that there are sufficient customers in the area to support the various department stores and other shops.

With respect to a convention center and hotel, Gunn said he did not want to step on anyone's toes but that if the tourist center could not be at Lighthouse Point then it could be in the proposed development.

The project development

would be on several levels, with parking at the grade level, with department stores rising one or two decks. These decks would be paved or tiled over between the structures to create a mall and preserve the scenic views from Mission Hill. Apartment houses would be terraced and set back against the stores and hill to minimize their impact on the visual setting.

Gunn and a partner, Virgil McDowell, noted that the full project would take years to complete, ranging from five to eight years if all went well to around 12 years if Penney's or the Emporium were actually lost to the 41st Avenue complex.

Gunn and McDowell wanted an expression of interest from the commission, and McDowell said the company would need exclusive negotiating rights to put the project together.

The city would be involved because through tax increment financing land could be acquired for housing, for parks and parking and for preservation of Mission Hill as a historic center.

The commission held the matter over for study.

Friday, December 4, 1970

SPACE will take up to 40 ft. trailer. El Rio Mobile Home Park, 2120 N. Pacific. 53-12-4-298

Monday, February 2, 1976

BY OWNER, in space at El Rio Mobile Home Park, in downtown Santa Cruz - 22' Terry, excel. cond. \$1275. 2120 N. Pacific Ave.

BY OWNER in El Rio Mobile Home Park, Space 4. 10x55 2 BR in excel. cond. Skirted. \$4195. 423-5717.

Friday, Sept. 10, 1976

1976 IDEAL Trailer, 30x8, left front tip out, best offer. Refrig. unit on roof. Space 57, El Rio Mobile Home Park, 2120 N. Pacific Ave., S.C.

## No Thoughts Now Of Moving People

Wednesday, May 19, 1976

# SC Redevelopment Thought Advances

Santa Cruz City Redevelopment Commission has recommended to the city council that it okay a study for the redevelopment of the area north of Water Street.

City Planning Director Bob Lawrence explained that the commission's recommendation is "that we go into an area and find out whether the conditions are right for renewal."

The commission discussed

the proposed redevelopment area Tuesday night, after the city council last week agreed to study the area for possible renewal into a shopping area.

Lawrence said the area to be studied is bounded by Water Street on the south, the cliff by North Pacific Avenue to the west, up to and including some of Harvey West industrial area, to the northerly city limits and to San Lorenzo River on the

east.

Lawrence said, "I should stress that this is a study area and is not intended as a proposed project area. The difference is that a study area is larger than the area included in a project... The two things are distinct."

Lawrence said the commission was concerned about residents in the area, primarily those who reside in El Rio Mobile Home Park on North Pacific Avenue.

Residents of that park are worried about redevelopment because, as one resident said, "We like living here and want to keep living here."

Lawrence asked residents of the mobile home park not to worry, because the city has not even decided to go ahead with

any redevelopment. "I don't even know if this will be a redevelopment area."

He said his staff will first study the area to see if it conforms to state guidelines of "blight." That study, to see whether the area is old and rundown, will take about three months to do. At that time, "we'll define where it is and what the options are for doing something about it."

The commission's action is only a recommendation, but that recommendation will go before the council, probably at its next regular meeting Tuesday.

Lawrence repeated his assurance that nothing will happen to the area immediately, saying that commissioners "spoke to the importance of good relocation policy and practice if there is to be relocation of residents or businesses."

He added that before any action is taken, state law requires the city to form a committee made up of residents of the area of proposed redevelopment.

Mayor John Mahaney last

week urged a study of possible redevelopment, citing the increased tax base which the development of a couple of large stores would give the city. He said that Penney's will move out of its store on Pacific Avenue Garden Mall within the next couple of years and has expressed interest in another downtown site.



# Housing panel backs renters' buying mobile home park

By MARIA GAURA  
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — A group of residents of the El Rio Mobile Home Park wants to join forces and buy the mobile home park, and the City Housing Advisory Committee voted Wednesday to urge the City Council to help them pay for it.

The Housing Committee voted 3-1 to urge the Council to issue a \$1.3 million tax-exempt bond to help the mostly low-income residents to buy the property and convert it into a cooperative housing project.

The total cost to buy and convert the park has been estimated at \$2.1 million by the Community Housing Corporation, which organized the tenants group and set up financing plans for the project. The balance of funding for the project includes an estimated \$553,000 from the State Mobile Home Park Assistance Program, \$60,000 in city funds, and \$108,900 raised by the tenants.

According to Community Housing Corporation Director Arnie Fischman, Pacific Western Bank (formerly County Bank of Santa Cruz) may be willing to purchase the entire bond offered by the city, and said the city will run no risk if the borrowers default on the loan.

The Community Housing Corporation may earn as much as \$30,000 for its work on the project, but Fischman vowed to continue assisting the El Rio tenants association to run the program even if his group earned nothing from the sale.

The park is near downtown Santa Cruz on a 5-acre parcel next to the San Lorenzo River, and now holds 90 mobile homes and three studio apartments. The park lies adjacent to land that is being considered for a downtown auto plaza.

Housing Advisory Committee member Marios

Cavadias voted against recommending the bond, saying "I'm concerned it would take what could be very valuable land off the tax rolls.

"In my mind that is a piece of prime commercial property," said Cavadias. "This is not the highest and best use of that property. For the short term that may be fine, but in the future we may turn around and ask 'why do we have a mobile home park here?'"

According to Fischman, the park tenants would pay no property taxes at all after the conversion, and qualifying low-income residents would pay much lower

monthly rent.

Other committee members lauded the plan, saying that it would preserve badly needed low-income housing at a minimal cost to the city.

Committee member Jane Yokoyama abstained from voting on the proposal because she is an employee of the Community Housing Corporation. Committee member Glen Schaller sits on the Board of Directors of the Community Housing Corporation, but voted on the proposal because he said that in his position, there is no conflict of interest.

Sunday, Oct. 11, 1987  
Santa Cruz Sentinel

## Mobile home park residents become landowners

By DENISE FRANKLIN  
Sentinel Staff Writer

A MINI-REVOLUTION, of sorts, is occurring in the normally staid environment of mobile home parks.

Little by little, the retired, the low-income, the families who call mobile homes "home" are rebelling against escalating rents, lack of control and fear of eviction. They are buying their parks.

"It's really the coming thing," said Maxine Pfeiffer. A resident of Blue Pacific Mobile Home Park in Aptos, she's the local representative of the Golden State Mobile Home Owners League.

El Rio Mobile Home Park in Santa Cruz soon may join six other resident-owned parks in Santa Cruz County; five other local parks, including Pfeiffer's Blue Pacific. Statewide, approximately 200 of the 3,000 mobile home parks are resident-owned, according to the Golden State Mobile Home Owners League. The rest are the typical set-up where occupants own their mobile homes, but not the land beneath them.

So, why buy the park? Spend thousands of dollars on down payments? Straddle oneself with 30-year mortgages for million-dollar-plus loans? After all, mobile home owners generally are retired people or on fixed incomes, according to the Golden State Mobile Home Owners Association. They've raised their kids, sold their homes and happily left the mortgage burden behind. Or they chose mobile homes because they couldn't afford traditional home ownership.

The most dramatic reason is to avoid eviction. That's what residents of Tradewinds Mobile Home Park faced in 1979. The new owners wanted to build a commercial development and gave residents 30 days to move out.

The residents hired a lawyer and convinced the Capitola City Council to rezone the land from commercial to a "mobile home park exclusive" zone, explained board member John Elstad. No longer able to build their commercial development, the owners agreed to sell.

The mainly low-income El Rio residents also began organizing when it looked as if they could be booted out, said Sue Marcus, secretary and former president of the residents' association.

"The city's River Task Force was talking about making another beachland along the San Lorenzo River from Water Street to Highway 1. It would have cut into the park in such a way that the park couldn't exist."

Believing there was no other place for the low-income residents to go, the residents banded together to buy the 90-space park — with some special financial aid. They are negotiating the price, which will be close to \$2 million, said Marcus. Escrow is expected to close in December.

El Rio residents got help setting up a limited equity cooperative from the Santa Cruz Community Housing Corp., a non-profit group that promotes affordable housing. Approximately 50 El Rio households qualify as low income.

The California Mobile Home Park Assistance Program has been asked to loan \$540,000 toward the purchase and the Santa Cruz City Council has passed a resolution to issue tax-free revenue bonds. This will allow Pacific Western Bank a tax break on its \$1.3-million loan to the residents.

Under the state loan program, low-income residents will not be required to spend more than 35 percent of their income on housing, including the mortgage payment, utilities and any loan on their mobile home.

IT WAS A novel idea when residents of Spring Lakes Mobile Home Park in Scotts Valley purchased their park for \$1,750,000 in 1972. "We bought it first for security and for investment," said Clyde Everett, an organizer of what may have been the first effort in the nation by residents to buy a park.

Homestead Mobile Home Park in Santa Cruz went the same way in 1972, but the buy-out was instigated by the owner. He had sold individual leases when the park was built in 1968. By '72, all the leases had been paid off, so he turned the deed over to the residents.

Monteville Mobile Home Park in Scotts Valley also is owned by residents, but was set up as a subdivision initially.

Among the more recent is the \$3.5-million purchase of Villa Santa Cruz nine months ago. "We had been thinking about buying it for a couple of years, for security. No one could ever move us out of here. There's a park in Scotts Valley that has been sold and in a year, all the residents have to get out," said Oswald Lake, member of the park's board of directors, treasurer and on the original purchasing committee.

"Also, we bought it to keep our costs down," Lake added. "Mobile home parks make money and by making that money ourselves, we are keeping our costs down. And, in a way, we wanted to keep the maintenance up. It was not run down; it was beautifully maintained. But

Please see Page E2

'Mobile home parks make money and by making that money ourselves, we are keeping our costs down.'

— Oswald Lake  
Treasurer, Villa Santa Cruz



El Rio residents look forward to owning their park.

## Wednesday, Feb. 10, 1988 \$1.5-million bond OK'd for El Rio park

The residents of the El Rio Mobile Home Park were granted a \$1.5-million tax-free bond from the City Council Tuesday night to help them buy the property they now rent. The bond issue was the last hurdle in a long-term effort to maintain the mobile home park as affordable housing. All of the bonds will be purchased by Pacific Western Bank.

The Community Housing Corporation helped organize the tenants and did all of the paperwork that led up to the sale. The bond was approved unanimously, and without fanfare by the council.

## Buying the park

Continued from Page E1

there were things we wanted to do that the owner didn't want to do," Lake added.

FEAR OF rising rents is the main reason park residents are buying the parks, according to Pfeiffer.

"The rising cost of rent" was the reason cited by Elaine Reedy for the \$2.2-million purchase in 1983 of Seaciff Mobile Home Park in Aptos. Reedy and her husband were managers at the time and helped organize the buy-out when the owners informed them they were ready to sell.

The county's rent control ordinance affects all parks in the unincorporated area. But the ordinance, Reedy noted, allows park owners to raise the space rents a certain percentage each year and to pass along to residents the cost of major repairs.

"There were too many of these pass-throughs. It was easy for the owners to get around it (the rent-control ordinance). Buying the park was a real boon to everyone living here," Reedy said.

Buying a park, Pfeiffer noted, doesn't necessarily decrease costs. And there sometimes are annual increases, but they're usually small.

At Seaciff, for instance, residents paid space rent of \$200.88 until the purchase, when rent went up to \$240; in five years, the increase has been an average of \$4 per

month each year. At Tradewinds, the before-purchase space rent was approximately \$175. After the sale, it went to \$225, then increased to \$240 and now is at \$250.

What happens to residents who don't want to buy? In many cases, they remain renters, renting their space from the residents. They benefit, too, from increased security, knowing the resident-owners aren't going to sell the park.

THE WAVE toward self-ownership gained momentum, Pfeiffer noted, about the time of the Seaciff sale. Mobile home park residents heard about the purchase of Cascade-owned parks in San Diego. The company was going under, the parks were threatened and the county put up bonds to help residents buy the parks.

According to Pfeiffer, more and more parks are considering buy-outs because of fear that rent control will be ruled illegal. The state Supreme Court will be deciding a case challenging mobile home rent control. Hall vs. the city of Santa Barbara, noted Pfeiffer.

"I believe, in the long run, the rental ordinances will phase out," she said. "We are having such battles in the courts between the park owners and the counties and the cities over the ordinances.

"The consequence is the park owners are letting the parks deteriorate. This leads to more lawsuits by the homeowners and an increase in the desire to do it themselves."

# El Rio Mobile Home Park goes co-op

By STEVE SHENDER  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz Community Housing Corp. Director Arnie Fischman called it the start of a "new era." Residents of the El Rio Mobile Home Park summed it up less globally in four words: "We own the park."

The 93-unit park at the end of North Pacific Avenue officially went co-op Thursday afternoon during a brief ceremony at the park's community building, where 93-year-old Edith Howlett became the first park resident to receive a co-op membership certificate. Howlett, who has lived in the park 29 years, got more than a piece of paper. As one of the new co-op's low-income members, she received a 58-percent reduction in her space rent as well, from \$190 to \$79 a month.

Howlett and other park residents celebrated their conversion from tenants to owners over apple juice and chocolate cake Thursday, together with public officials and bankers who helped float the loans which made the conversion possible. They reflected on how they would never again have to worry about the park being sold out from under them, and some of them began talking just like veteran property owners — vowing to fight the development of a condominium project next door.

The city-funded Community Housing Corporation helped residents organize the cooperative and assemble more than \$2 million in financing

needed to buy the park. The city, Western Pacific Bank, the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and the state Department of Housing and Community Development all had a hand in the financing arrangements.

The single largest chunk of money came from \$1.3 million in low-interest, tax-exempt mortgage revenue bonds, issued by the city and purchased by Pacific Western. The state Housing and Community Development Department's Mobile Home Park Assistance Program advanced the co-op a low-interest loan for \$518,000. The balance of the money required to close the deal was raised from park residents, who paid \$1,500 each to join the co-op. The Credit Union advanced low-interest loans to 21 of the 63 households which have joined the co-op so far. The co-op membership fees will be refundable, with interest, when residents move from the park. Park residents who choose not to join the co-op will pay slightly higher rents than co-op members.

Community Housing Corporation officials said they believed the park deal had marked the "first use of a tax-exempt mortgage revenue bond for the cooperative acquisition of a mobile home park in the United States."

Those are the dry facts.

The human side of the El Rio Mobile Home Park housing equation was spelled out by park resident-owner Michael Ress Thursday afternoon. "I feel 100 percent more secure," said Ress as he sat on a couch holding hands with his wife,

they can't extend the mall down here or widen the (San Lorenzo River) levee.

"Also, we know our rents aren't going to go up a whole lot."

The park is bounded on one side by the river levee. Cheri Carmody, president of the El Rio Mobile Home Park Cooperative, said that fears that the park might be "ruined" by the proposed levy-widening project started residents thinking about forming a co-op in October 1986. Later, she said, residents were given more reason to fear that their homes were in jeopardy when, seemingly without warning, a neighboring parcel sprouted multi-story condominiums. "The park owners were notified, but we weren't," she said.

"That started us thinking about what was happening around here."

Now that residents own the park, Carmody indicated, they'll be taking even more interest in what is happening around them. One of their first goals, she said, will be to block construction of still more condominiums there.

"There are plans for more condos on the other side of the park," said Carmody. "We don't want them to go in."

"They would be so high, it would be like living in a fishbowl."

Henceforth, that kind of talk is to be expected from El Rio residents. After all, the riverside neighborhood is their backyard now.

Friday, Dec. 9, 1988

## Santa Cruz will be honored for mobile-home partnership

By DONALD MILLER  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The city of Santa Cruz will receive an award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for its role in assisting residents of a local mobile-home park acquire the park as a cooperative.

The award will be presented by HUD official John E. Wilson at the 4 p.m. session of the Santa Cruz City Council meeting Tuesday.

The award, annually presented to "exemplary" public-private part-

nerships across the country, is in recognition of the financing partnership that acquired the El Rio Mobile Home Park on North Pacific Avenue. The partnership involved the city, the state, Pacific Western Bank, the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and the cooperative members, and was arranged by the Santa Cruz Community Housing Corporation (CHC), which oversaw the entire acquisition.

The project was also selected because it preserved the park in a cost-effective way as long-term affordable housing, according to Arnie Fischman, executive director

of the CHC.

The CHC-arranged financing allowed the co-op members to acquire the 93-unit park without any increase in their monthly payments, Fischman said. In addition, the cooperative structure ensures that all of the spaces in the park will remain permanently affordable by low- and moderate-income households.

The project received a \$518,000 loan from the state of California, but without any other large government subsidies. There was no expense to the city, Fischman said.

# Mobile home co-op given 30 days to start repairs

By GREG BEEBE  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — State investigators have given the owners of the El Rio Mobile Home Park co-operative 30 days to start correcting widespread health and safety violations at the park.

If the co-op's board of directors does not act quickly to fix deficiencies at the tract of 91 mobile homes and trailers — including extensive electrical problems — officials from the state Department of Housing and Community Development say they will ask the county District Attorney's Office to file criminal charges.

A supervisor from the depart-

ment's code enforcement division met with the co-op's directors Thursday morning, then walked the grounds of the trailer park, where he allegedly found some 135 violations of the state Mobile Home Parks Act and the state Health and Safety Code.

The co-op, which is home to an estimated 220 people at the end of North Pacific Avenue along the San Lorenzo River levee, has one month to present Housing and Community Development with its plans to get up to code.

"In my opinion we have bent over backwards with the co-op and it has not accomplished a satisfactory correction of the violations," said Travis Pitts, deputy director

of the state Department of Housing and Community Development in Sacramento.

Jack Knox, secretary of the El Rio board of directors, said the park is moving quickly to fix the problems. The board, he said, will put repair jobs out to bid soon, with work expected to be completed by early November.

Violations past and present at the park include insufficient power supply to the trailers, improper venting on sewer drains and water heaters, and faulty construction materials. Some of the coaches are also bunched too closely together.

Payton said "70 percent" of the violations involve the park's antiquated electrical system. The park



Dan Covro/Sentinel

State housing inspector tours El Rio park Thursday.

— established in 1928, or earlier — couldn't keep up with changes in state codes over the years, he said.

Deficiencies at El Rio first surfaced in June of 1990 when a state Please see EL RIO — A13

## El Rio co-op faces deadline

Continued from Page A1

inspector found some 350 violations of state law. The inspection came after the co-op — which made headlines in 1988 for being the first low-income, tenant-owned park of its kind in the nation — applied for a state loan.

A later inspection in June of this year revealed 300 safety flaws, said Payton. "We have corrected the majority of those violations, except those (which need to be made) under an upgrade program. We need to get a loan for that."

The hitch came when the park couldn't afford to fix the electrical problems without a loan, and couldn't get a loan without first fixing the electrical problems, a dilemma Payton termed a "Catch-22."

Knox discounted the "Catch-22" analogy and blamed the park's loan woes on "bad communication" with the state.

A Housing and Community Development official found "horrendous problems" when the park was inspected in June 1990. The state returned and, on May 14 of this year, "we decided that their progress was not satisfactory," said Pitts. El Rio then requested — and was denied — a 180-day extension to correct the problems.

A letter sent by the state after another inspection on June 17 gave the park until Aug. 30 to fix the problems or face referral to the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office. An inspector paid still another visit July 17.

"A year is enough," said Pitts.

Although the department sees similar violations at other mobile home parks throughout the state, "what is abnormal about this is the reluctance to correct those violations," said Pitts.

"We're not talking about major cost items. We've been waiting for a year for them to mark the lot lines, to drive a stake in the corners of the lots."

Thursday's visit by the state was at the invitation of the park's board of directors. The directors, Knox said, wanted the state to see the many good-faith corrections that have been made there. The directors also wanted to state officials to hear the El Rio plan for correcting the park's power supply, a job Payton estimated would cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000 to complete.

Arnie Fischman, director of the Community Housing Corporation, attended Thursday's meeting at the park. The Housing Corporation coordinated the park's switchover to co-op in 1988 and still works for El Rio as a consultant.

Fischman described the negotiations as "very productive," and state officials as "very flexible and cooperative in working with the co-op to develop a plan for correcting the violations."

El Rio was originally built as an auto park catering to tourists. It has faced adversity before, especially when the Santa Cruz flood of 1955 damaged much of the park.

It is unusual not only for its co-op status, but also because it caters to low-income families and is home to a wide variety of trailers of varying ages, widths and designs.

Friday, Nov. 15, 1991

# Santa Cruz mobile home park receives loan for repairs

SANTA CRUZ — The El Rio Mobile Home Park Cooperative has received another loan from the state Department of Housing and Community Development to make mandated repairs.

The \$481,850 loan announced Wednesday comes on top of the \$518,150 loaned by the state office to buy the mobile-home park.

The cooperative will use the newly loaned money to rehabilitate its electrical and gas systems, and to help pay for short-term loan interest.

In August, state inspectors found 135 health and safety violations at the park, including extensive electrical problems.

Problems first surfaced in June

1990, and park operators were chastised a year later by state officials for not making the necessary changes and repairs.

In addition to the loan, \$200,000 from the state's Housing Rehabilitation Program has been committed to the project. A grant of \$60,000 from the city's Community Development Block Grant funds al-

so has been approved.

El Rio is a family mobile-home park at the end of North Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz for low-income households. It has 90 mobile-home spaces and three apartment units serving about 220 people.

It became the first low-income, tenant-owned park of its kind in the nation in 1988.