

REAL ESTATE SECTION



Willits Cafe comes down

It was a sad sight for many earlier this week when it was finally time to take down the old Willits Cafe building, which has been in a state of disrepair and mid-crumble for several years. Various elements, including hazardous material and a final gas line securing by PG&E, were finally handled, and the crew of T. Lawrence Construction started working Monday, removing the wood, metal and brick from the old building on the corner of Main and Commercial streets.

One special project was to save the large in-house century plant, which was so massive it started protruding through the glass windows back

in 2016. With the help of Bill Wilson, Public Works supervisor for the City of Willits, the crew removed the plant and found a new home for it – and a few of its little babies – at the Commonwealth Garden located next to Adventist Health Howard Memorial Hospital.

The future destiny for the lot is still to be determined, but hopefully something Willits needs and will enjoy can be built in place of the Willits Cafe. Check out Willits Weekly's Facebook page for community memories and sentiments about the old cafe, and share yours there, too!

— Maureen Moore

At top, left: Scooping up the debris at the old Willits Cafe site is easy work with the help of an excavator from T. Lawrence Construction. At top, right: On Tuesday afternoon, only a few walls were still standing. Above: The old Willits Cafe building as it stood Monday afternoon. Demolition had already started on the back portion, but the front still resembled the eatery of many residents' memories.

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Above: Ananda Johnson of the Howard Foundation, left, poses with Bill Wilson, Public Works supervisor for the City of Willits, and the giant century plant that was removed and saved from the old Willits Cafe's south wall. The century plant is now situated at its new home: the Commonwealth Garden. At right, top: You could still barely make out the words "Willits Cafe" on the sign Monday afternoon. At right: The cash register was pulled aside from the rubble. See a few more photos on Page 5.



Photos by Maureen Moore



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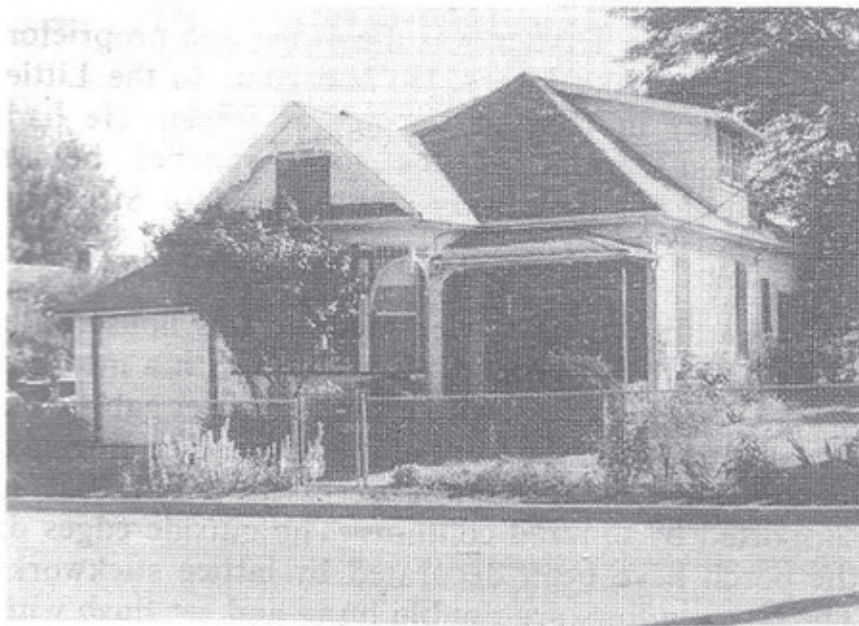


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205 East Valley Street built in 1901

The house at 205 East Valley was built by the owner, T. N. Hale in 1901. Mr. Hale was a prominent grocer in Willits at the turn of the century.

The house features a medium hip roof with a gable extension over a modest bay. The gable is trimmed in bargeboard, and is covered in overlapping patterned shingles. A small portion of roof forms a pediment across the base of the gable. The roof of the gable and the main roof are trimmed with a box cornice, sloped soffit and a plain frieze. The one and a half story house has also had shed roof dormers added to the house. The house is covered in wide shiplap boards, including the bay.

Reprinted with permission from the 1988 book "The Architectural Heritage of Willits," by Nelson A. Streib and Susan Pritchard, commissioned by the City of Willits.

Now and Then

205 East Valley Street



Presented by
Heidi Hernandez
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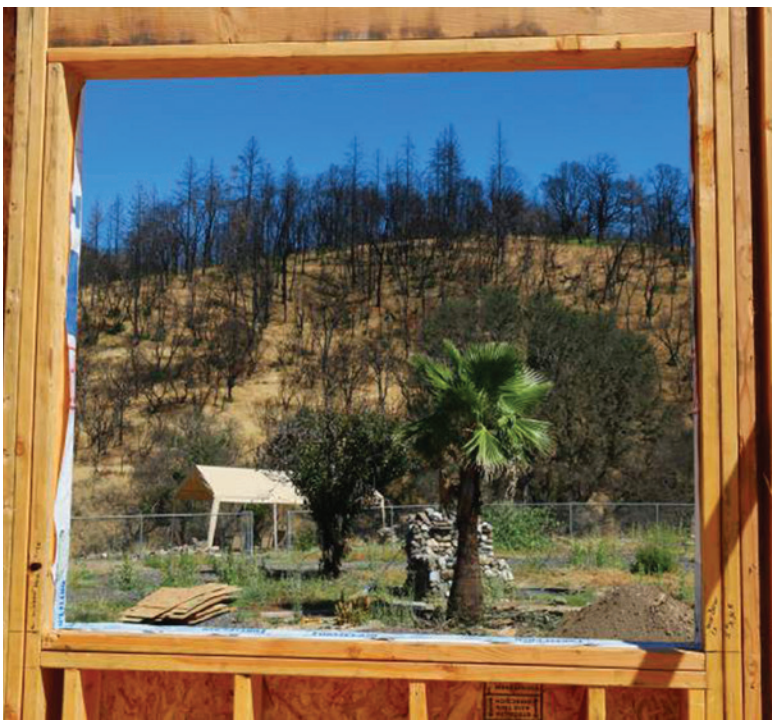
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Above, left: George Borecky is eager to move into his rebuilt home on Tomki Road in Redwood Valley this fall. The October fires burned down the family house of 43 years. Above, right: Frank Belford's home on Fisher Lake Drive in Redwood Valley nears completion. Below: A foundation and subfloor rise at the site of a home on Tomki Road.



Above: The view from Art and Denise Barclay's new home in the firestorm-devastated Fisher Lake Drive neighborhood in Redwood Valley looks out to charred trees.

Below: A charred hose bib post is a reminder of the October 2017 firestorm that destroyed the home of Art and Denise Barclay on Fisher Lake Drive.

From the ashes

Redwood Valley homeowners rebuilding after deadly October 2017 firestorm

By Jeff Quackenbush

Reprinted courtesy of the North Bay Business Journal

More than 380 homes were destroyed in Mendocino County last October – that's almost one-quarter of the housing in the rural Redwood and Potter valleys. More than 36,000 acres of the county burned in the blaze, which started late October 8.

Nine months later, 312 of the about 400 burned sites in Mendocino County have been cleared of debris and turned back over to the property owners, according to county CEO Carmel Angelo. The rest have been cleared of debris, but county paperwork still needs to be finalized.

So far, 77 rebuild permits have been issued, and another 12 are under review. Of those, 41 are for manufactured homes, and the rest are standard construction.

"That's pretty good that we have that many building permits so far," Angelo said.

Of the issued permits, six homes have been finished, four of which are manufactured dwellings.

Return of a hard-hit neighborhood

One of the Redwood Valley homes in the "home stretch" of rebuilding belongs to George and Nancy Borecky. They have lived on the Tomki Road property for 43 years and had just finished remodeling their home before the fire.

Early on October 9, the Boreckys were awakened by something they don't recall. They had less than 15 minutes to flee with themselves and their dogs. Blasting the vehicle's air horn to alert their neighbors, they sped through flames and smoke so thick they could barely see the markings on Tomki Road as they headed south.

Theirs was one of 44 lots that burned in the Mountain River Ranch subdivision, which also includes Fisher Lake Drive, where 18 homes were destroyed and two people died.

Like other neighbors who have their homes under construction, the Boreckys are now living in their motor coach on the property as Cupples & Sons Construction of Ukiah completes the exterior of their new home.

One of the four homes on Fisher Lake Drive that started to rise from the ground again is a 1,500-square-foot house for Steve and Katrena Dursteler. It's a totally different floorplan from the 2,300-square-foot house they had lived in for 14 years before the fire. They had revamped their backyard just two weeks before the fire.

"We could not afford to rebuild what we had, because the cost of materials has increased so much," Katrena Dursteler said.

While their USAA insurance policy paid out to the limits on the structure, the Durstellers said they could only get 75 percent for contents without itemizing what was lost.

Rebuild reset: Overevacuation

Work on the Boreckys' lot started in January, first by crews the Army Corps of Engineers hired to clean the site of contaminants left by the incineration of their home. But 127 of the Mendocino County sites in need of cleanup were overexcavated, according to Angelo, the Mendocino County CEO. State officials came in to look at the sites and found 82 were eligible for covering the cost of backfilling the holes where the homes once stood and compacting the new material.

"If we were to do the debris project again, we would have the state and federal governments pay as they did, but it might be better for everyone if it might be possible to have the recovery efforts done locally," Angelo said.

The Boreckys' home site was among those that needed the most backfill, up to 5 feet deep, at a cost of \$15,000 for materials and experts such as their own contractor and soils engineer. The Durstellers said they paid \$17,000 to get their property fixed.

The Boreckys had that extra cost covered by their home policy, according to Jared Hull, their Ukiah-based Farmers

Insurance agent. The carrier offers 10 percent of the value of the home to cover building-code updates, such as what are required before plans for the original house can be approved for permits.

On hearing the reports of the firestorm damage, Hull said he raced to the office at 6:30 am and started calling clients who lived in Redwood and Potter valleys. He had authorized the wiring of up to \$15,000 in living expenses to the Boreckys by the following morning.

The company ended up with 70 total-loss home claims in Redwood Valley. Insurance claims from Mendocino County topped \$183 million, according to a December 1 report from the state Department of Insurance.

Hull's office also paid out a number of \$500 allowances for evacuees. Within a couple of weeks of the start of the fire, the carrier approved 100 percent coverage of personal property without questions.

After the Borecky home site was declared cleaned, it took three weeks to get permits to rebuild. Cupples & Sons started work on the foundation of the couple's new home in April, and the interior wallboards were finished by mid-July. The goal is to get the county certificate of occupancy by mid-September, George Borecky said.

Ukiah contractor lines up Santa Rosa rebuilds

The Boreckys' home is one of three homes Cupples & Sons has rebuilt in Redwood Valley, according to foreman Casey Cupples.

"We haven't had a lot of trouble; inspectors have been really fair up there," he said. "Hardest thing is for owners to get the plan they want approved by the county or a city."

That's why after finishing the home they're working on now, Cupples & Sons is headed for north Santa Rosa, where the seven-employee business has three rebuilds lined up. Casey Cupples' father, Rick, started the company in 1977. Originally homebuilders, they turned to commercial projects in 1998 and have specialized in school projects in recent years. "We got back into homes because of the fires," Casey Cupples said.

Homeowners seek help with rebuild process

While Mendocino County's building and planning departments offer information online and in print about the rebuilding process and resources, several residents of the Mountain River Ranch subdivision who are in the midst of rebuilding said they wished the steps necessary were more clearly defined.

"There is no simple system in place to do things at the county building department," said Steve Dursteler. "We need one packet that tells us who to contact and when."

After trying to manage the rebuild in between Katrena Dursteler's work as a local teacher, the couple had help from a good friend who is a construction consultant and had worked for the County of Mendocino and the City of Healdsburg.

"He pushed us to get going," she said. "We were the first to get a permit and get our foundation in."

Then the Durstellers' rebuild was delayed because their lender called for information after the new foundation was built in March.

The Mendocino County CEO said the Redwood fire did show that local, state and federal agencies can cooperate on a monumental task of battling the blaze and revving up the recovery.

"We're so used to criticizing government, but we can work together," Angelo said. "Though Mendocino County is a fairly small government, I think our planning department has done great at getting people back to rebuild."

Reprinted courtesy of the North Bay Business Journal, www.nbbj.news. For the full story, originally published July 23, 2018, go to www.northbaybusinessjournal.com/northbay/mendocinocounty/8543076-181/rebuilding-redwood-valley-mendocino-wildfire





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