

## **Dreaming up a viable future for cement plant site**

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Unlike the rest of Napa County, American Canyon's roots were more industrial than agricultural. A little over 100 years ago the Standard Portland Cement Company mined limestone and clay in quarries next to its manufacturing plant at what was then known as Napa Junction. While the plant was in operation many workers and their families lived on site. After the closure of the cement works a number of families stayed on at the abandoned facility.

Today, what's left of that plant and additional buildings constructed by the Basalt Rock Company that took over the site in the 1940's will be the heart of American Canyon's planned town center -- a new downtown for a city that lacks one

The American Canyon general plan, adopted in 1994, designates the 100 acres east of the Union Pacific rail line that includes the cement plant ruins as a potential future park.

Last week, the Eagle chronicled the plant and its history. Last November, we joined two women who grew up at the cement plant as they walked the grounds with Mike Anderson, chief operations officer for Aegis Equity Partners. Aegis formed a limited liability company with the Jaeger family, which now owns the ruins, to restore and develop the site. Mary Sanders and Florence Clerici, now in their 80s, recalled their youth, in which empty buildings filled with colossal machinery served as their playground. They also mused on the site's rebirth.

"Picture a civic building surrounded by hills, vistas and clouds," said Mike Anderson. "Over here a beautiful park and a little lake."

Anderson was talking to Florence Clerici, and Mary Sanders, and he was talking to them about their old home. Originally a cement plant, later an abandoned factory where Clerici and Sanders were raised, the plant is being prepared for another transformation -- into the town center for American Canyon.

Anderson's company, Aegis Equity Partners, has teamed up with the owners in a long-stalled project that remake the site -- now an imposing landscape of ruins, into a commercial and government center with a large park.

Taking a deep breath, Anderson continued the tour. "What a spectacular town center, with a view . . . "

Anderson's vision does require some imagination. The non-reinforced masonry is crumbling on many of the buildings and the arches on some are gone. The Basalt Rock Company silos are leaning precariously.

American Canyon Planning Director Ed Haworth said, "Some buildings are easy to preserve or rehabilitate and some are real hazards. The round building (the Basalt rotunda) has reinforced concrete in the structure so it is the easiest to preserve."

The structural integrity of all the original buildings is currently being evaluated and site designs are still in the preliminary stages.

A civic center, library, and satellite college campus similar to St. Helena's are some possibilities that have been mentioned. The Basalt rotunda may become a performing arts space. Botanical gardens, a future rail station for the Wine Train in addition to shops, apartments and housing are all being considered.

"An outdoor amphitheater around Miller Pond for concerts would be another use to create a place with a view -- something the community could get excited about," said Haworth. He added, "I envision the city having an outstanding, real civic center complex, a permanent library and community college campus a (short) walk from the high school."

Regarding the many suggestions for the site, he said, "The only thing that limits you is imagination."

Anderson has his work cut out for him. But, he said, "We believe a true town center will be built or well under construction by 2008 or 2009."

According to the Highway 29 corridor study, the plan for this site should integrate civic, residential and commercial uses along with a public open space.

Jack Jaeger, project manager for the Jaeger family, says he was "activated by listening to the community's (desire for) a town center and it sparked a vision." Prior to the combining with AEP, the Jaegers worked to gather land entitlements for the town center project.

Jaeger added, "We reacted and (our conceptions) evolved as the town incorporated. Mike Anderson is the perfect partner to execute. He's the troops in the field to pursue the development of the city."

"A town center: It's the newest old thing," said Anderson. To streamline the planning process, a town center subcommittee was created. The subcommittee, comprised of Haworth, Councilmembers Leon Garcia and Cindy Coffey, City Manager Mark Joseph. Public Works Director Bob Weil, has monthly meetings. Subcommittee members recently visited Santa Clara's Rivermark and the Town Green in Windsor to get ideas for multi-use projects.

"Once we formulate ideas, we'll have public outreach and invite the community's ideas and input to build a community consensus early on," said Anderson. Plans for the public outreach meetings are slated for late spring or summer. Anderson went on, "It's the very (essence) of a private and public place we can all get excited about. We want to get the community behind it, because it is, after all, all about community."

"The last 10 years have been a real exciting time," said Jaeger. "And now, we're at the tangible prospect that this is going to happen. The city and the county are more receptive now. We will truly be the Gateway to the Napa Valley (and) have a sense of community."