Saranap Nostalgia: Many memories to be razed

Photo John T. Miller

working in the store along with

away in 1973 and Martha became

a familiar figure behind the regis-

His second wife Donna – who had

been a loan officer before marrying

Tony – helped in the store and did

quent visits to the store and mar-

ried him. "I knew when I married

him that the store would become

my life," said Donna. "We worked

there from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days

a week with some help in the eve-

nings." Tony LaRossa's first wife died tragically from a fall off a

The Morucci family ran the

Downstairs from the store, the

different enterprises, including Val-

on previous page), a moving com-

tha had a soft spot for other small

morning," recalls Donna LaRossa,

"and even though we didn't have

any tables, they'd stand around and

The store was sold to a Vietnamese conglomerate, and Ann

According to Donna, Mar-

"A lot of the local workers

pany, and a beauty salon.

never amounted to much.

deli at the store for a time and

Donna met Tony on her fre-

the books.

By John T. Miller



Former owners Tony and Donna LaRossa are hoping they can salvage this iconic sign and transfer it to their daughter's property in Carson, Nevada.

n a few short months the wreck- where he starred in football and ling crews will descend on what track. The rest of his time was spent was once the hub of unincorporated Saranap in order for Hall Equities his sister, Carmen. Louis passed Group to build the new, vibrant and updated Saranap Village.

Hauled away with the rubble ter while Tony managed the store. and debris of the antiquated buildings and vacant lots will be the memory and nostalgia of simpler times when family-run businesses carried out the day-to-day commerce of the area.

In an attempt to preserve some of this history, this two-part article looks at these former times and an appreciation for the contributions of some of these families.

One of the prominent landmarks to be removed when construction begins is the LaRossa horse. Market building, which has stood since the mid-1950s.

After managing markets in eventually set up their own popu-Alameda and Berkeley beginning lar sandwich shop down the street. in the 1930s, Louie and Martha The Moruccis eventually sold their LaRossa moved to Lafayette where business and the family name. they opened a grocery store at the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard LaRossa's rented space to many and Pleasant Hill Road.

The county wanted the prop- ley Glass (see accompanying story erty to build a freeway ramp and the LaRossas were forced to sell. Appealing to the county for more money, they were able to buy property on Boulevard Way where a businesses, so the rent she charged chicken ranch existed.

According to "Saranap: Then and Now," written by Dorothy M. came in for donuts and coffee in the Ligda (2006), many of the neighbors – much like in recent times – objected to the large structure being built near their homes. The family persisted, though, and the market was built in 1955.

The LaRossa's son, Tony, at- and Philip Pham, who survived tended Acalanes High School two years in a refugee camp after

the war and eventually escaped by boat (as told in Ligda's book), ran the market for several years.

In April of 2002, however, the Contra Costa Times reported a scandal in Lanai's Massage and Beauty Image Plus downstairs. Three women were arrested in an undercover sting and charges of prostitution were brought against a ring that had collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal money.

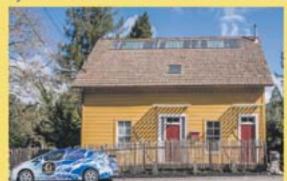
Because the people connected with the prostitution ring were Asian, many assumed the Phams were involved. They were upset and denied any involvement, according to Ligda, and continued to run the store.

In May, 2004, Sufism Reoriented bought the property, using the gutted market for their charitable endeavors. After Hall Equities

purchased the land, Mike Murphy clinics there while waiting for their bar.) permanent facilities.

(Next Issue: A look at the old Baseball has temporarily equipped Holy Ghost Hall, Leo's Mobil Serthe site with batting cages and runs vice Station and Danny Van Allen's

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Food trucks staying in Orinda

visit."

... continued from page A1

rateurs, because Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday are the nights on which they earn enough to cover their bills. They asked that the ful opportunity with a great deal project be discontinued, or moved to another night.

project were overwhelmingly positive, however, stunning the council with 90.5 percent of respondents wanting the project to continue, and rating it 4 out of 5 stars, although they expressed somewhat less enthusiasm for the long lines.

Javid Ebrahimi, the owner of Taste of the World, the food truck agreed that the pilot was a great company running the pilot project, attended the council meeting with Samantha Ross, also of TOW. Ebrahimi said that the project exceeded their financial expectations, thanked the city and WUDO for their help, and stated that they openness and willingness of TOW wanted to continue the food truck to partner with local businesses. event through the winter so people That sentiment was echoed by Vice won't forget about them.

sibility of a different night with event for a beer, then moved on to the council. Apparently, no one a local restaurant for dinner. Counhas ever tried food truck events on Mondays. Tuesdays conflict with other events, like Concerts in the Park, and Wednesdays are an almost sacred swim event night in Orinda. The weekend would be even worse for the restaurants, so that left Thursday nights, which have proved to be very popular. However, Ebrahimi expressed his willingness to work with the restaurants to promote their businesses by advertising them on the

The choice of Thursday night was food truck televisions, or by having particularly galling to the restau- a tent for local businesses at each

Council Member Dean Orr said the food truck event was a wonderof support. He had the sense that Orindans enjoyed the opportunity Respondents to a survey on the to bump into other community members at the event, and, while he expressed sympathy to all small businesses, he found the food trucks to be fundamentally different and so well supported it would be hard for him to vote against continuing the event.

Council Member Darlene Gee success, a 100-percent positive, fun event that added to the community's enthusiasm about downtown Orinda. The pilot appeals to a wide variety of people, she said, and added that she was amazed at the Mayor Amy Worth, who added that Ebrahimi discussed the pos- some customers just came to the cil Member Inga Miller deemed the proposal to continue the pilot a "no brainer." She commended TOW for its outreach and Planning Director Drummond Buckley for the

survey. The food trucks collect and remit sales tax. Ebrahimi said he would like to be a registered business, but as yet Orinda does not issue business licenses. He was also open to the concept of a fee, which

will be incorporated into the RFP.

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