

Published August 5th, 2009

Hit Hard and Gassed Out in Lafayette

By Glenn Nosse



Construction site on the corner of Brown Ave. and Mt. Diablo Blvd. Photo Glenn Nosse

Trans Am as a repair facility, expressing confidence in an economic rebound to the eastern commercial district of Lafayette.

A block away, the vacated Marx Brothers Motors, next to defunct Butler Conte Dodge, remains abandoned. Glenda Warmoth, an assistant planner with the City of Lafayette, says the Marx Brothers land is under consideration for a forty-six unit, senior apartment complex to be owned and operated by Eden Housing. With construction scheduled for January, 2010, "It's too early to tell if the car repair will blend with future projects in the area," said Warmoth. Across from the station, the newly remodeled Forge shopping complex is ready for tenants. "I would like to know what becomes of that gas station property," says Forge owner Tony Lukazewski, "Right now, it's been a lot of noise." Lukazewski hopes to attract a more upscale and vibrant crowd much like that of the redeveloped west end. Ingram said his Trans Am gas station is the oldest station in Lafayette, built in 1922. He realistically reflects how his industry, like the economy, has changed since he originally opened. "I can remember an old blacksmith working behind the current Shell station down the street. You could ride down Mt. Diablo and get your horse shoe-ed. That was only thirty years ago."

Work on Ingram's site continues, paving over what once were the tanks and pumps. The repair shop remains open during the demolition. Ingram recalls the end of an era saying, "Just, no gas."

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When John Ingram surveyed the gaping craters that up to two weeks ago held thousands of gallons of gasoline, he said, "I'll just have to tell my children the place got hit by an asteroid."

Ingram has operated the Lafayette station since 1977, located at the corner of Brown Ave. and Mt. Diablo Blvd. After years of attempting to compete with franchisees he has relinquished his claim as the last independent gasoline dealer in Lafayette. "Sad to see the big guys take over... I was unable to compete with their volume and prices. The tanks were still new and not leaking," said Ingram.

Ingram's Trans Am station began as an Atlantic Richfield station, "The one with the Red Flying horse," he proudly recalls. When the holes are backfilled, his station will join other independents like the Olympic station on the west end of town that was demolished and now stands as an empty lot.

Despite being forced out as a dealer, Ingram is able to look at the positive side. He says he will continue to operate