

Mill and Lumber buildings set to move

■ The move across San Pablo Avenue will take place early Sunday morning, when traffic should be lightest

By Alan Lopez
STAFF WRITER

EL CERRITO — The corner of San Pablo Avenue and Schmidt Drive will undergo a dramatic change when two buildings are moved to the opposite side of the street in the early morning hours Sunday.

Two remaining sections of the once-bustling Mill and Lumber building will be moved directly across the street to an empty parcel on the west side of San Pablo at Orchard Avenue.

A six-building, 158-unit apartment complex with some retail will be built in its place as soon as 16 months from now.

"We're in the last closing moments before everything starts to break loose out there," said John Baer, principal partner of JMS Developers of San Carlos, which owns the property where the apartments will be built.

JMS bought the Mill and Lumber building and the parcel of land it occupied and was going to demolish the building before Aaron Vitale, president of Vital Building Enterprises Inc., stepped in.

Vitale owns the block of land at San Pablo and Orchard avenues, which contains a building



JOANNA JHANDA/STAFF

AARON VITALE, an El Cerrito native and president and developer of Vitale Building and Enterprises, has his moving the El Cerrito Mill and Lumber building across San Pablo Avenue.

Move

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Vitale offered to take the Mill and Lumber building off JMS's hands, and use it for office and retail space on his empty parcel across the street.

"We heard input that everybody would like the building to be saved," said Vitale. "A couple people even approached us to find a way to save the building."

Only part of the Mill and Lumber Building will be saved: the second story, which faced west on San Pablo Avenue and sat on the building's main entrance, as well as a second building, which sat on the north side of the property.

Both buildings will sit on a new ground floor and have office and retail space, including Vital Building headquarters.

CLOSED STREET

From 2 to 6 a.m. Sunday morning, San Pablo Avenue will be closed as the two Mill and Lumber buildings are moved from one side of the street to the other. San Pablo Avenue will be closed for about a block between Schmidt Lane and Manila Avenue. El Cerrito Police officers will direct traffic around the closure.

"Even though it looks like drastic changes, it'll go back together the way it was," said Vitale.

The two buildings will be placed on giant dollies by today and are scheduled to be moved by truck across the street between 2 and 6 a.m. Sunday morning, the time when the smallest number of cars are sup-

posed to be on the street. The street will be filled with blocks 6 inches high that will level out the street with the sidewalk so the buildings can easily be wheeled across.

San Pablo Avenue will be closed for about a block between Schmidt Lane and Manila Avenue, with El Cerrito police officers at each end to direct drivers. Motorists driving south on San Pablo Avenue will detour on Manila Avenue; drivers going north will detour on Schmidt Lane.

"This is a first for us," said commander Scot Mosby of the El Cerrito Police Department. "There's been a lot of work on Vitale's end. On our end it's been relatively low-impact."

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