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ENCINITAS: EL CAMINO REAL CORRIDOR

By Patricia Morris Buckley

A slogan for many coastal cities could be, "a freeway runs through it." There are few places where that's truer than in Encinitas, which almost has a split personality due to the opening of I-5 in the 1960s.

On the west side is Old Encinitas, the quaint beach town that lines Highway 101. It's a place to walk, shop and enjoy historical buildings such as the La Paloma Theatre, built in the '20s, and the lotus-shaped tops of the Self-Realization Fellowship Center. There are antique shops, art galleries and coffee houses to explore. And best of all, an ocean breeze drifts over from nearby Moonlight State Beach.

On the other side of the freeway is a completely different picture. Filled with service-oriented stores, it's not as pedestrian friendly, yet it's the destination for many serious shoppers. It boasts grocery stores, office supply venues and general merchandise outlets.

"The area along El Camino Real is more what you'd expect to see in other cities," noted Keith Turner, CEO of the Encinitas Chamber of Commerce. "It's made up of stores that people feel comfortable shopping in, such as Trader Joe's. In the historic district, there's a surprise on every corner and it's very walkable, which appeals to visitors. There's something good to be said for both."

In many ways, Encinitas residents reap the benefits of having two such different commercial zones. "It's as if Encinitas is two different places," Turner said. "It's like two different approaches to a downtown."

The El Camino Corridor is in the process of changing. Back in the '80s, it felt like a series of strip malls. "And in those days, it pretty much ended at Monte Vista," he pointed out. "But it's been an area of growth for Encinitas for



Photos by LOUISE DONAHUE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SURFDOG'S JAVA HUT IS LOCATED ON HIGHWAY 101 JUST NORTH OF SWAMI'S BEACH



BARNES & NOBLE BOOKSELLERS IS ONE OF THE MANY STORES IN ENCINITAS TOWNE CENTER.

a long time. Now it's twice as big."

Much of that development has been recent. Plus, it's of a different kind of commercial infrastructure.

"The biggest difference we've seen is the addition of big box stores, such as Home Depot and the Encinitas Towne Center," he said. "That's the biggest signal of the changes of

the time."

These stores benefit the area in many ways. For instance, the diversity of venues keeps Encinitas residents within city limits when they go shopping. They no longer need to visit another city for their retail needs.

"We do our best to promote shopping in Encinitas first," he said. "It's like supporting the

home team. We don't want a preponderance of big box stores, but this type of a tax base is good for the city."

As a result, Encinitas has not only become a convenient place for residents to shop, but also a destination for other North County residents. "It's really exciting," Turner said. "It makes us a very good place to spend money."