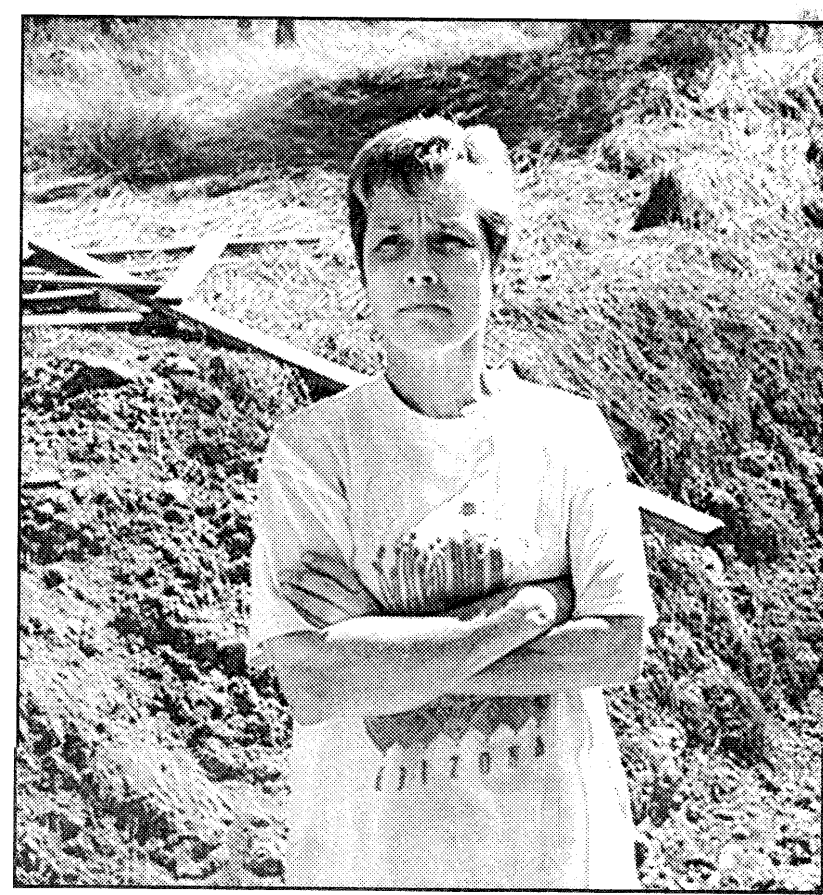




"Our house has no value now." — Lori Mitchell, Rancho Calaveras homeowner



BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: Lori Mitchell stands on her Rancho Calaveras property, where raw sewage is leaking from behind her home. Nobody knows quite where the sewage flow originates. Worse yet, no one knows how to stop it.

Record photos by AMELITA MANES

Rancho Calaveras subdivision defines crisis

Leaking sewage makes dream a nightmare for some residents

By Richard Hamner
Record Staff Writer

When it was created, Rancho Calaveras was promoted as a slice of foothill paradise. It held forests of oak and buckeye, fields of golden grass, sprinklings of wildflowers. The development boasted miles of hiking trails and seven shimmering lakes. It boasted, too, the promise of a leisurely lifestyle far from the madding crowds and congestion of the cities to the west. Rancho Calaveras, it seemed, would be a place where lucky homeowners could make the California dream a reality.

Lori and Bob Mitchell can't wait to get out. Their dream property has become an unending nightmare, they say. That's because raw sewage is leaking onto their property. It emerges as a milky-blue ooze from a rocky shelf behind their home. Nobody knows where the stinking flow originates. And nobody knows quite what to do about it. "Our house has no value now," said Lori Mitchell, who discovered the flow just after moving into her new home in August 1995. She and her husband are fighting Calaveras County, claiming the county should have prevented the problem through better planning and inspections. County officials, though, say the problem is not their responsibility. Developed by Boise-Cascade in the 1960s, "Rancho," as it is commonly referred to by locals, is

among the biggest subdivisions in California. It is not, say residents and planners alike, among the best planned. Septic problems have driven some residents out. Traffic congestion has increased, but money to provide improvements has not. Hiking and horse trails have been abandoned. Several lakes envisioned as community jewels have dried up or become choked with algae. A spokesman for Boise-Cascade declined to comment at length on the infrastructure needs of Rancho Calaveras. "Boise-Cascade has been out of the subdivision-development business since 1972," said Dave Gadda, the company's associate general counsel. "There are very few people here now who were connected in any way with Rancho Calaveras."

Imperfect example Rancho Calaveras, say some planners and public officials, reflects the planning — or lack of it — that has defined growth in many parts of the Sierra foothills. Thousands of new homes have been allowed to go up, and new residents allowed to move in, without adequate streets or sewers or parks or fire or police protection. "There was a kind of a naivete at work for many years. A sense that, somehow, this will all be taken care of," said James Coyne, who was appointed to the Calaveras County Planning Commission earlier this year. But it was not all taken care of. Infrastructure in the hills is especially expensive — and revenues hard to come by. More rocks must be blasted aside, more earth moved to make way for utility lines and roads. Yet compared to the tax base in

urban areas, the base in the foothills is shallow. There are fewer factories and corporate headquarters to enrich city or county coffers. Instead, what have risen in the foothills have been homes, either solitary ranchettes on a few acres or vast subdivisions such as Rancho Calaveras. "But they haven't paid their own way," said Russ Eviit, a former Amador County supervisor. "They may pay some of the upfront costs for new streets and sewers. But what about the costs for maintaining them? What about police protection and parks and a new traffic light down the hill? Those are the hidden costs that, over time, can create a huge burden." In the past 20 years, the swiftest growth in the foothills has been in El Dorado, Nevada and Placer counties. But many land-use experts say the next 20 years will bring a similar surge into

Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties. And they say those counties must plan now — or accept increasingly clogged roads, crowded schools, and strained water and sewer systems. Some Placer County leaders wish they had taken stronger steps earlier. A study in 1992 showed the county needed \$100 million to catch up and build new jail cells, government offices and other improvements. The county did not have the money and still doesn't. "Our experience here has shown very clearly that it is never too early to think about providing infrastructure," said Fred Yeager, Placer County planning director. Yet there are signs that the Mother Lode counties are already falling behind. Please see SUBDIVISION, SR8

"I don't think you could come up with a single plus." — Gary Colburn, Plymouth resident

Huge development planned for small town

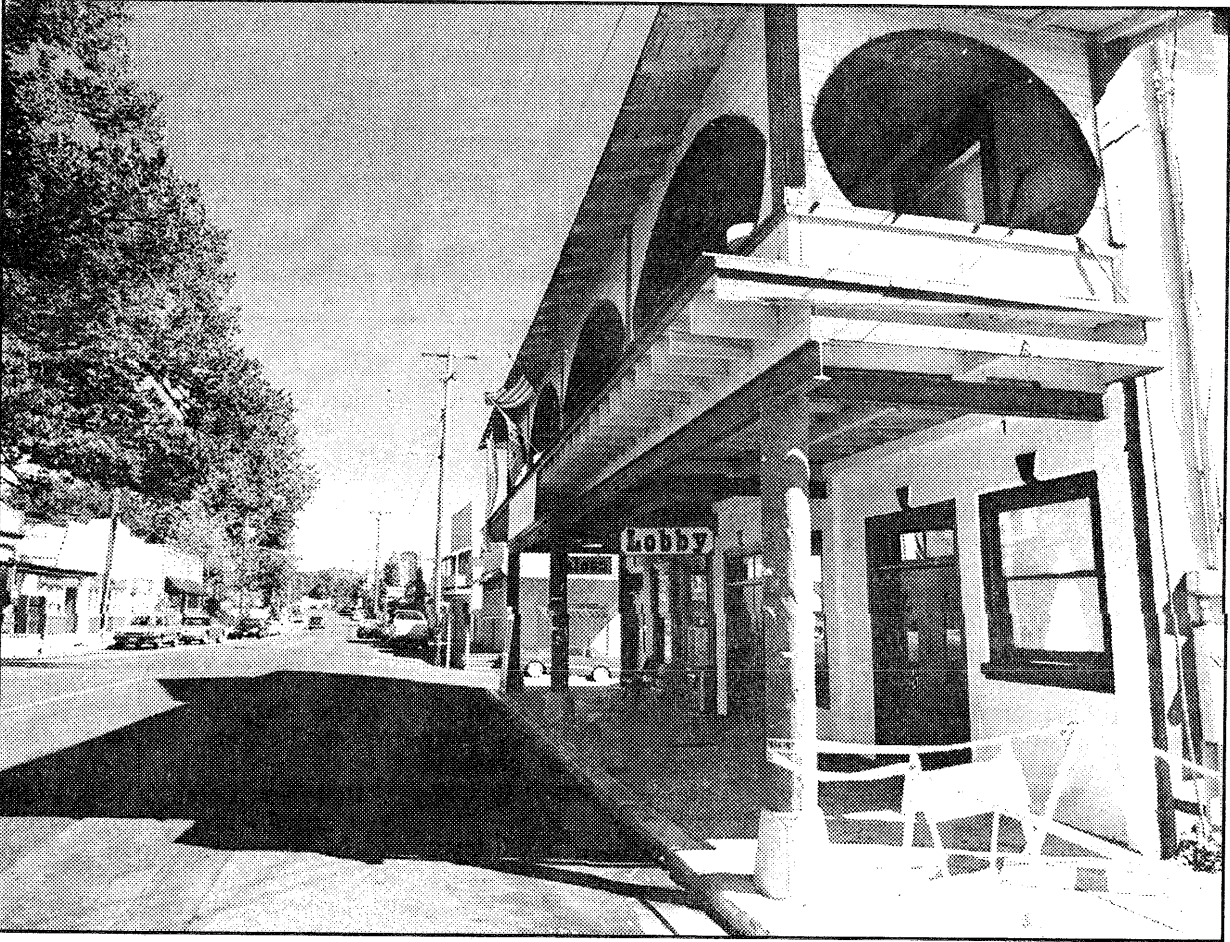
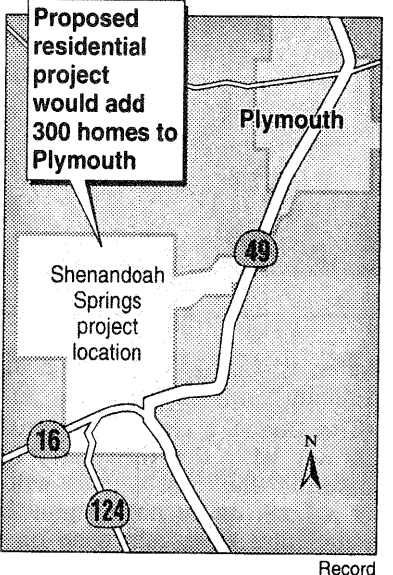
Shenandoah Springs would nearly double Plymouth

By Francis P. Garland
Lode Bureau Chief

PLYMOUTH — Gary Colburn can't think of a single good thing that might come from 300 new homes springing up and practically doubling the size of this quiet Gold Country town. John C. Andreason can't see how a town like this can survive and have any hopes of prospering without growth, as long as it pays its own way.

At the crux of their disagreement is a bold proposal known as Shenandoah Springs — a mixed-use development whose plans call for 300 homes, 12 acres of open space and parks, an 11-acre village center with shops and medical clinics and two job centers. Colburn and Andreason, both longtime Plymouth residents, aren't alone in their disagreement. But just how many residents are for and against the proposed development won't be known until next month, when an advisory measure appears on the ballot.

The debate over Shenandoah Springs contains elements that can be found in virtually any discussion about growth in the foothills. It is better, as the Sierra Business Council report contends, for towns to grow by adding new homes to existing neighborhoods adjacent to existing towns? Or are stand-alone projects with hundreds of homes, commercial centers and the infrastructure



Record photo by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

DOWNTOWN: Plymouth is quiet on a weekday. But development planned for a site near the junction of Highways 16, 49 and 124, is built.

needed to serve them a better way to handle the tide of growth that forecasters predict is coming to the Mother Lode? Not the size that counts Some say it's not the size or location but the quality of the development that is the key. Terri Bailey, chairwoman of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, said in general she supports the concept of a "master-planned" development. Such a development, known as Flowers Ranch, is in the works near Copperopolis. Some are convinced Shenandoah Springs will never get off the ground, even if residents approve the advisory measure on annexing the 655 acres needed to make the development a part of the city. Until recently, plans for Shenandoah Springs had called for 800 homes and a 200-acre golf course to go with commercial and

professional office space. Only within the last two weeks have planners for the property owners — the Putnam family of Woodside — announced the project was being scaled back. Old plan 'a dinosaur' Gary Clark, Amador County's land-use agency director, called the old Shenandoah Springs pro-

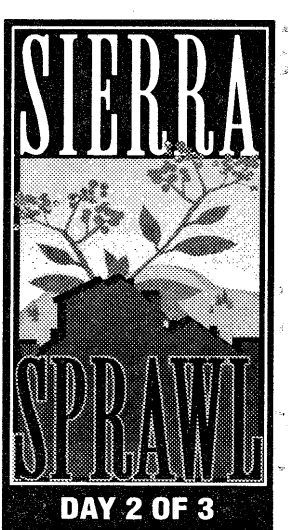
posal "a dinosaur" because it would have cost too much to develop. Clark said he doesn't see developments much larger than 100 homes ever coming to fruition in Amador County — and only in areas where nearby services can be extended. But he said if the upfront development costs can be kept in check, Shenandoah Springs could survive with 300 homes because of its rural appeal. "But there's still a big question — where are they going to get the water?" asked Clark. "Whether it's 800 or 300 homes, you still have to have water." Some critics of Shenandoah Springs, which would be built near the junction of Highways 16, 49 and 124, say it's a prime example of "leapfrog" development,

since it would be connected to the existing city of Plymouth — assuming it would be annexed — by a narrow strip.

Colburn and others say even with 300 homes and no golf course, Shenandoah Springs could leave this sleepy town of wood-frame and masonry buildings, a small City Hall and park fiscally bankrupt because residential development doesn't pay the bills. "I don't think there's any type of development that size — you're talking about dropping a Rancho Murietta down inside our city limits — that could benefit anyone living here right now," Colburn said. "I don't think you could come up with a single plus."

Neighbors agree Susan Bragstad, the mayor of nearby Amador City, won't argue. She fears the development would trigger traffic, air quality and water problems, and would degrade the surroundings that draw so many visitors to the area. Bragstad would prefer to see growth occur at a much slower rate. Amador City, for example, grows at a snail's pace, perhaps adding one or two new homes a year which Bragstad said is just fine. Andreason, though, doesn't see it that way. "Small cities like Plymouth are like small businesses," he said. "There is a size necessary for the overhead of city government to be adequate. You must have a larger tax base than a small city like Plymouth currently has in order to favorably affect the public facilities. That's why I favor some development, as long as it can carry the net cost of the additional improvements like sewers,

Please see PLYMOUTH, SR8



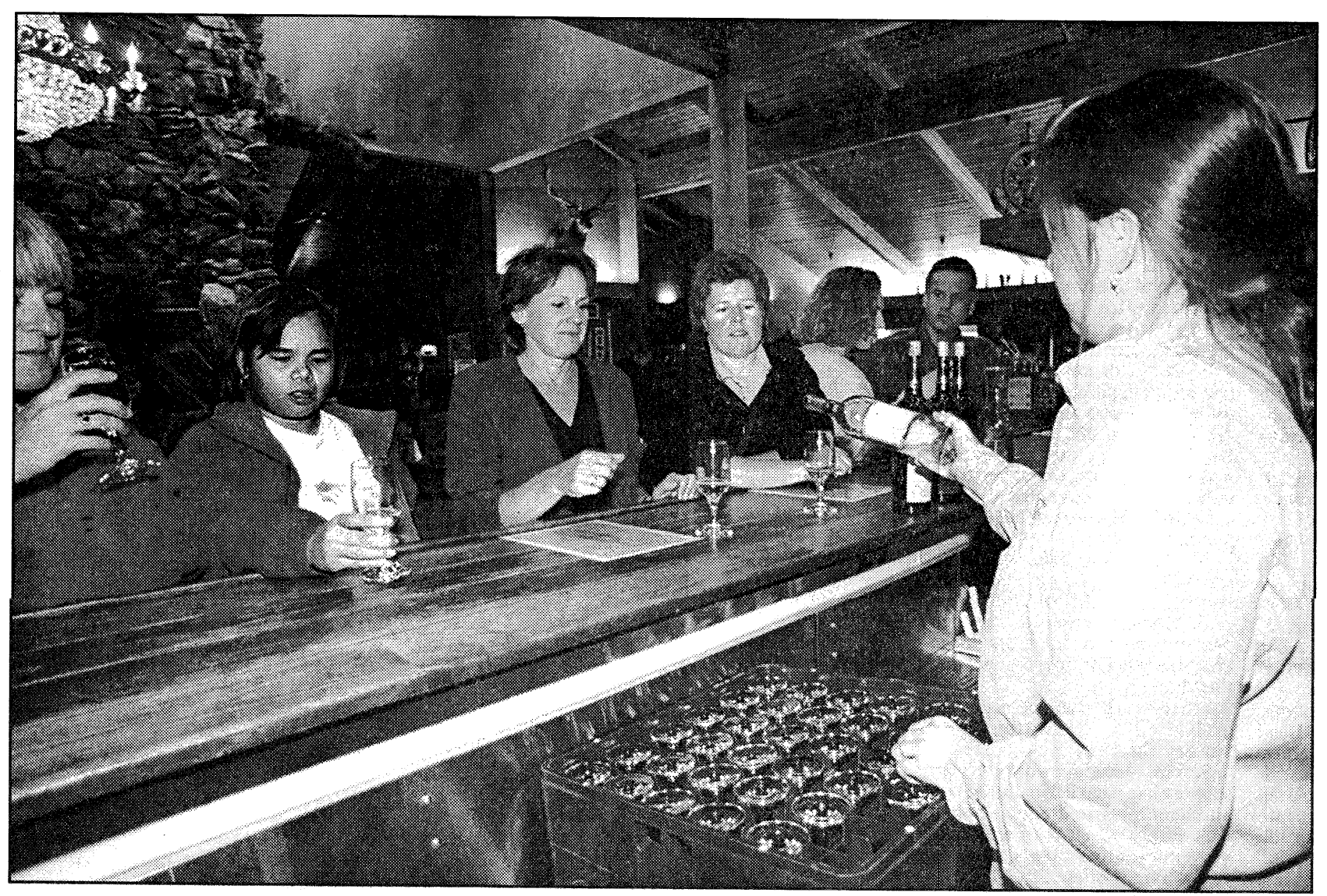
Lode mines jobs from tourism

New economy works on service, commuting

By Francis P. Garland
Lode Bureau Chief

There's an economic revolution under way in the Sierra foothills. The region made famous for the wealth mined from its generous ground and harvested from its verdant forests is steadily moving away from its reliance on resource-based industries. Taking hold is a new economy grounded in a surging demand for jobs catering to new settlers who commute to distant employment centers, or jobs that serve the needs of weekend tourists who make the foothills a year-round playground. And then there is the increasing number of telecommuting "lone eagles" who make up a quasi-underground labor sector.

Will this new economy open the door for 24-hour convenience stores, fast-food franchises and other hallmarks of suburban sprawl? Can it provide jobs that sustain families and generate the taxes local governments need to provide services? Many who live and work in the region say the success of the emerging economy will depend on how well they protect the foothills' beauty. You can have your olive-oil boutiques and rock-climbing adventure tours, they say. But there's also room for more traditional resource-based jobs without clear-cutting, hydraulic mining and other methods that have scarred the land. The signs of the changing economy are everywhere. Job hubs like the former Georgia-Pacific sawmill in Martine are closing. And new agricultural attractions, such as the multimillion-dollar Kautz Ironstone Vineyards near Murphys, are opening. Two regional ski resorts — Kirkwood and Dodge Ridge — are planning expansions. Added to the fluid economic picture is the flight of "lone eagles." The eagles are independent techno-consultants and contract workers who have found they can survive, and even thrive, by soaring beyond the big city and feathering new foothills nests with modems and multiple megabytes of RAM. The eagles are a fairly new phenomenon. But as it becomes more acceptable to travel to work via fiber-optic cable than on concrete and asphalt, those eagles — in concert with the growing tourism and recreation industries — could help jump-start a Mother Lode economy stunted by the closure of mills, mines and other industries in recent decades. As the foothill counties grow and attract more residents, the key to economic prosperity will be how well — and how quickly — they can diversify, said Ron Mittelbrunn, executive director of the Amador Economic Development Corp.



SERVING TOURISTS: Lisa Moser pours wine at the Kautz Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys. The Lode economy depends on tourism.

Record photo by AMELITA MANES

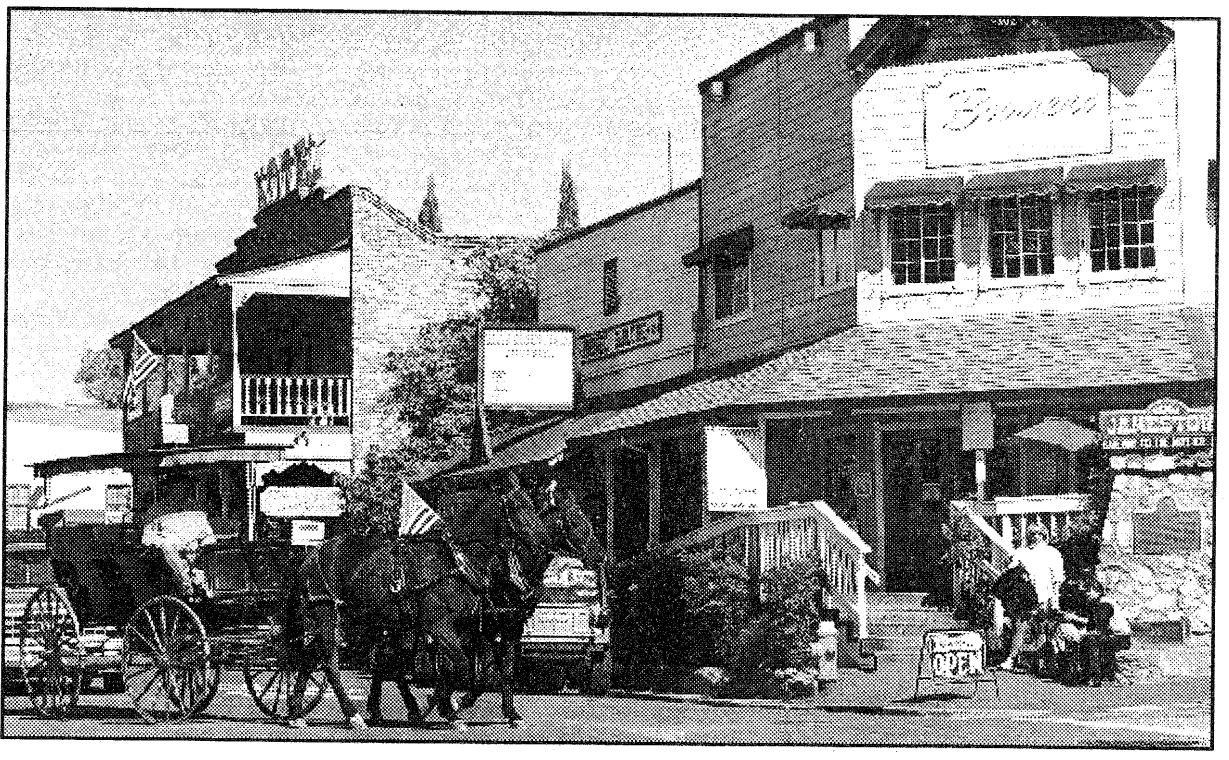


LONE EAGLE: Using her computer, Kate Reynolds, left, works out of her home in Murphys. Record photo by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

SUNDAY IN JAMESTOWN: Tom Fraser, below, offers buggy rides in Jamestown. His Quartz Mountain Carriage Company is the type of tourist-based business that is easy on the environment. Record photo by AMELITA MANES

er and doesn't seem to be any worse off for it. "I'm working on the other side of the world, virtually speaking," he said. "I can't imagine living any other way." Not everyone, though, can be a lone eagle. That's why economic development groups continue to work at bringing in new business and industry and helping existing businesses expand. Terry Easley, executive director of the Economic Development Company of Tuolumne County, said the electronics and industrial die-mold businesses have gained a foothold in recent years and have the potential for even more growth. She also pointed to the \$2 million planned expansion at Dodge Ridge. "That could increase the ski area's capacity by 1,000 visitors a day," Easley said. "That's a lot of gas, rental cabins and motel rooms. And jobs."

Gold mining returns In Amador County, the Sutter Gold Mining Co. is working to amend a conditional-use permit that would open the gates to the Lincoln Mine — an underground mining and processing facility that also would include a visitor's center to cater to tourists. Michael Sweeney of the Sutter Gold Mining Co. said the project eventually would provide between 110 and 130 jobs. The company hopes to start crushing rock sometime next year — the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Coloma. Gold isn't the only thing in the ground worth mining, according to Mittelbrunn of the Amador Economic Development Corp. He said an effort is under way to woo manufacturers interested in tapping the millions of tons of clay and other minerals in Amador County. Already, Amador County is home to about a dozen mines that extract lignite, sand, gravel, clay and other materials. "We've got products used in everything from floor tile to roofing granules to road base," Mittelbrunn said.



"I think a lot of our jobs will be based on the tourism industry ... restaurants, travel agents, retail sales, hotels, service industries in general." Terri Bailey, Calaveras County supervisor

It's the quality of life here that has attracted new residents and businesses to the foothills in recent years. Take Pneucan Manufacturing, which since 1989 has made pneumatic air valves in a plant near Valley Springs. The company had operated for 22 years in Richmond, an East Bay city with its share of urban problems, said Brian Miner, a company vice president. "The quality of life was low," Miner said. "The owner bought 500 acres outside Valley Springs and said let's move up. It was the quality of life that attracted him up here. Personally, I felt my life had come to an end when I was transferred." But Miner made the move, found a nice home in Paloma and discovered the quality of life is better. "The crime rate's lower," he said, "and you don't worry about your car being stolen and you don't lock your doors. And I don't hit a single stoplight on my way to work."

Do I want to go back to that world? I looked down. I'm in a white blouse, a long denim pinafore and sandals. And I'm thinking: "Not likely." That's because Reynolds can sit at home in Murphys with a "modern and a machine" and do her contract work. In a sense, she said, she and others like her are no different from those who punch a clock in a conventional work setting. "It's a different kind of service sector, but there's a significant number of people making money working that way. It's a quieter economy." Larry Busby, executive director of the Central Sierra Economic Development District, said it's difficult to estimate the number of lone eagles living in the foothills. "We've tried to identify them," he said. "But they do their own things, and it's basically like an underground economy." Reynolds said Calaveras County and the foothills attract workers like her because they're drawn to the natural beauty and the slower pace of life. That's what attracted Ross King. Like Reynolds, King had been living in an urban setting in the Bay Area, before he and his wife, Dianne, began looking for a place in the country. What they found was their own personal paradise on 51 acres near Pioneer, in Amador County, where King can do his market research for companies in the semiconductor business. He said his clients had no problem with him abandoning the Bay Area for the Amador County country. Now, he conducts business on his home comput-

restaurants and shops are converting towns like Murphys into tourist magnets. Officials say tourism can boost a local economy. "It brings money in without taking a lot away in terms of services, schools, fire protection and hospitals," Reynolds said. "But tourist-related jobs generally are lower paying, and they're seasonal. And they're much more vulnerable to state, national and regional economic trends."

Tourism important sector Terri Bailey, chairwoman of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, said tourism will continue to shoulder a large share of the economic load. "I know the county wants to become active in computers and possibly getting some assembly plants here," she said, "but I don't know if that's realistic. I think a lot of our jobs will be based on the tourism industry and by that I mean restaurants, travel agents, retail sales, hotels, service industries in general."

The growth in service-sector jobs in the Mother Lode in recent years has been staggering. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, the number of those jobs in Amador and Calaveras counties nearly doubled between 1980 and 1990 and grew by another 23 percent between 1990 and 1994. The service jobs are, by and large, environmentally friendly, said Ciro Toma, an Amador County developer and member of the local economic development board. "We've lost 550 jobs in the last two or three years and most of them were family wage jobs," Armstrong said. "That's had a major impact on our economy. And that's a big concern for us."

Even the environmental community recognizes the importance of the industry and the need to keep it healthy, although some say its importance to the overall economy and job scene has been exaggerated. "No one in the conservation community is trying to stop the timber industry from continuing to be an important part of the socioeconomics of this region," said John Buckley of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center. However, Buckley said, many in the timber industry overstate the impact that reductions in logging on the Stanislaus National Forest have had on the job market. Statistics from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis aren't specific as to the location of timber jobs. But the numbers show that in Tuolumne County, the amount of forestry, agricultural services and related industry jobs actually has increased from 153 in 1985 to 288 in 1990 and 310 in 1994. Those statistics are challenged, though, by Easley and a nonprofit group called the Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment.

Ginger Armstrong, spokeswoman for the group, said numerous jobs have been lost due to the cutback in logging, but they don't fall under the timber heading. She said when a mill closes or logging slows, it affects truck drivers, machinery-repair workers, the corner grocery and even the bank. "We've lost 550 jobs in the last two or three years and most of them were family wage jobs," Armstrong said. "That's had a major impact on our economy. And that's a big concern for us."

