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## **Courting new energy Nut Tree seeking increased activity**

By Jennifer Gentile/Staff Writer

Like some other tenants at the Nut Tree Village Marketplace, Vintage Sweet Shoppe owner Debbie Dever will be closing her doors temporarily in the coming weeks.

The store should be shutting down shortly after Mother's Day and returning four to six weeks later. When that happens, Dever will have gained about 100 square feet and be a stone's throw from her current location in the Nut Tree Village Marketplace.

She also will be selling some edible nostalgia - honey cookies made using the authentic Nut Tree recipe. The treats date back to the 1950s during the site's heyday as a roadside landmark.

"I'm excited about it," she said. "I think we'll have a little bigger space. I also have one of the original cookie decorators coming to work



Sean Whiskeman talks about a renovation project at the Nut Tree Village Marketplace, including reducing the number of bocce courts.  
(Joelrosenbaum/JRosenbaum@TheReporter.com)



Debbie Dever, owner of the Vintage Sweet Shoppe, is excited about work at the Nut Tree Village that will give her store more space and higher visibility. (Joel Rosenbaum/JRosenbaum@TheReporter.com) with me at the store."

Vintage is one of a few stores that will close, pack up and relocate during a renovation at the Nut Tree Village. The project will be well under way as early as Monday, according to Sean Whiskeman of developer Westrust.

The operation will cost an estimated \$1.5 million, Westrust said in a February statement, and is meant to increase exposure for

tenants and accessibility for patrons. Within the last six months, some businesses have left the complex on Monte Vista Avenue amid a lack of activity, and in at least one case, a landlord-tenant dispute.

The makeover will begin in the bocce grove, Whiskeman said, which will be renamed the Village Grove. Four of the eight bocce courts will be removed - making way for a children's

play area with an oversized chess set, benches, and distinct outdoor fire places reminiscent of the old Nut Tree. The remaining courts will be resurfaced.

"The lighting in this area will be doubled," Whiskeman said. "It will be much more visible, brighter. This whole area is just going to be opened up."

The developer is also aiming to open up the marketplace, Whiskeman said, and give the tenants more visibility. The rock facade will be removed from the buildings, and while the large metal roofs will stay in place, some areas that are enclosed by walls will be brought outdoors.

"The goal of this whole thing is to give everyone an external presence," Whiskeman said.

A space that is now inside the building that houses Villa Corona Mexican Restaurant and other shops will become an outdoor dining area. Like Vintage Sweet Shoppe, Made in California and Winters Fruit Tree will be closing for a matter of weeks and moving to "more prominent suites," according to Westrust, while Fenton's Creamery and Villa Corona will stay open during the renovation.

This summer, two more tenants are looking to join the newly dubbed "Eats and Sweets Court." What's Up Dog!, a gourmet hot dog store based in San Francisco, is going through the process to move in along with The Cheese Steak Shop, which sells authentic cheese steak sandwiches and specialty items.

Janece Long, general manager of Made in California, said she will probably be closed as well by the end of next week and reopen about a month later.

"I'm very excited, personally," she said. "My store is going to be about three times bigger than it is now."

The expansion will allow Long to provide a "Nut Tree General Store" that sells everything from cameras to Kleenex.

Meanwhile, Winter's Fruit Tree will add fresh fruits and vegetables to its offerings when it reopens. The Jelly Belly store will stay put, but it will be getting an expanded storefront and will have access from both the front and the breezeway.

The developer will be picking up the tab for the work and compensating the businesses for losses, Whiskeman said, adding, "Our goal is certainly to have everyone back open in June."

"We've been working closely with the tenants to coordinate the move," he explained. "We're trying to make the process as smooth as possible. ... A lot of the tenants are really excited about this opportunity."

One of those tenants is Dever, who said, "It's going to be good for the complex, good for the community."

"I think overall," she added, "It's going to be really good for everyone."