

To the rescue: ancient avocado trees saved by faculty

When Dirk Schroeder, who used to tend the roses along the mile-long fence on El Camino Real, called up Prof. Ronald Bracewell, he said in effect:

"I seem to recall that the avocado trees behind the President's office were planted about the same time as the circles on Inner Quad."

Their conversation took place before the Christmas holidays, when it became known that the seven trees were endangered by the proposed remodeling of the old Graduate School of Business, now known as Building 120.

His remark inspired Bracewell and his colleague, Prof. Eric Hutchinson, Faculty Senate secretary, to redouble their efforts to save the 80-year-old grove from destruction.

Contractor Ralph Larsen of Burlingame had told officials in

Facilities Planning he could save about \$40,000 in construction costs if he could take out the trees. It would be simpler for his heavy equipment to dig the subbasement if there were more room, he said.

Those big dollars loomed large in the official thinking until an instant ad hoc committee of Bracewell, Hutchinson, and staffers from the nearby offices of the president and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies pointed out some other reasons to save the trees.

For one thing, many an agile jumper had been able to leap up and snare a fresh avocado from the lower branches in the grove.

More important, the trees had brought shade and beauty for decades to the otherwise barren corridor between Memorial Court archways and the entrance to the old Law Annex.

The weekly faculty-staff newspaper, *Campus Report*, brought the situation to the campus attention, and Peninsula newspapers, sensing a "woodman-spare-that-tree" situation, picked up the story.

Bracewell, a radio scientist and electrical engineer, is a well-informed arborist who often conducts tree walks around the campus. He is also a member of the National Shade Tree Conference.

Using their standards, he and Hutchinson carefully measured the trees in the grove and estimated their value at \$22,884—"to say nothing," as he said at the time, "of

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Herb Fong, the University's arborist and grounds supervisor, supported the two professors.

"It would be a shame to cut them down," said Fong, "because we can

compromise by pruning them, wrapping the branches and protecting the trunks."

The trees, Fong noted, are relatively rare for the Northern California climate.

"They are a bearing avocado of the genus *Persea Americana*. It would be too expensive to move them, much more than either cutting them down or protecting them," he said.

"Compromise," was the key word in Fong's comments.

Through the good offices of Don Price, construction administrator in Facilities Planning, a benevolent stance by University administrators, and a compliant contractor, a compromise was worked out.

Only one tree, closest to the building, will be taken out. A smaller one near the President's office will be trimmed.

Barring any other last-minute changes or unforeseen circumstances, said Price with fingers crossed, all the others will be saved—including the biggest and oldest nearest to the Memorial Court arches.

Building 120 will be remodeled as others have been on The Quad—gutted and rebuilt from the inside.

Work started Jan. 7 on the \$10.6 million project, which eventually will have 39,000 feet of assignable space.

It will house Sociology and Communication, and include a new TV and film studio, sociological research laboratory, and related classrooms and offices for Humanities and Sciences.

Completion is scheduled for September, 1982, taking some 900 construction days, Price reported.

—Jeff Littleboy

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