

## Local man works to bring life to Mercey Hot Springs

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In a little-known corner of Central California is a little-known resort called Mercey Hot Springs. Located only 35 miles from Los Banos, the resort boasts one of the most historical pasts of any vacation spot in Central California. And according to Larry Ronneberg, the resort also has the brightest future of any of those places.

Mercey Hot Springs was reportedly first discovered by the native Indians, who used it as an Indian rancheria - a spot where they gathered for recreation. The resort earned its modern name when the first European settlers found Little Panoche Valley and the hot springs within. John Mercy had originally settled in San Juan Bautista and had opened the town's first public bakery. When he married in 1850, he moved with his new wife to the area where the hot springs are. The Mercy family then raised sheep, which were sold for food to the miners of the nearby New Idria mine.

Now the 160-acre resort is a work in progress for Ronneberg, who purchased the property about five years ago.

"Purchasing a resort like this was never really part of a big life plan," said Ronneberg, a self proclaimed escapee of the Silicon Valley. "However, since I was a teenager I did dream about having a place out in the country where I could be creative and have room to do most

anything I wanted."

Ronneberg worked in the computer industry for 23 years. His most recent job was running the Information Services department for Western Digital. But eventually he got tired of the grind and started looking for a change.

Now, Ronneberg is doing what he wants - almost.

"For sure, I'm doing what I want," he said. "But I've also never worked so hard in my whole life."

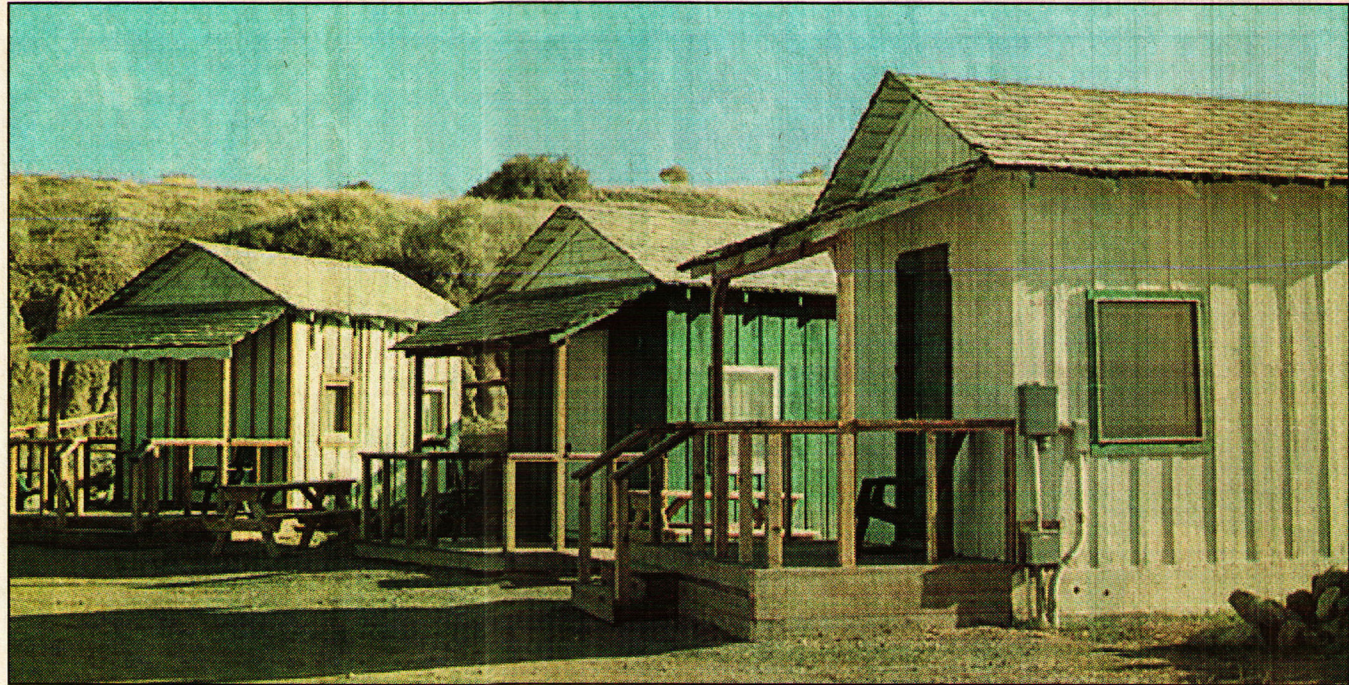
According to Ronneberg, the only thing that he wants to be different right now is the money flow.

"I just need some investors," he said. "Then this place could be completely up and running by summer."

Without investors though, Ronneberg is working day by day, completing the projects as he can.

Currently, there are campsites, RV hookups and five cabins available for guests. Ronneberg calls the cabins, "camping cabins" because they are small and don't have built in bathroom facilities. But they are quaint and historic. They were originally built in the early 1900's for staff members of the resort.

Ronneberg said that when he purchased the property the realtor recommended they just demolish all the old buildings and start over because of their deteriorated condition. But one thing that Ronneberg loved about the site was its historical value and he made a commitment to keep it.



Three guest cabins that were built in the early 1900's for staff of the resort.

Photo by Jerzy Aust/ Special to the Enterprise

Since that time he has been working to rebuild the resort to meet the needs of modern consumers, while also maintaining the pieces of history that exist there.

The first thing that Ronneberg had to do when he purchased the property was to rebuild the entire plumbing system. And since there are no commercial utilities to the site, he had to find a way to produce electricity. To do that, he installed a hybrid electrical

plied from the natural hot springs.

Other future plans include adding more hot tubs, an on-site restaurant, conference facilities, a golf course and a museum to showcase the area's history. Ronneberg's long-term plans show the museum in an existing building that he calls "The Chapel."

The Chapel is the oldest building on the site, constructed in 1908 by Owl and Liggett pharmacies. They put the building

As the money comes and the time is available, Ronneberg keeps the work going, striving day in and day out to reach his dream of a hot springs oasis tucked into the beauty of the Little Panoche Valley.

"There's a completely different kind of reward a person

gets out of this," said Ronneberg. "A lot of my friends in the Silicon Valley that knew what I was doing thought I was crazy. Maybe I am, but I'm sure a lot happier than most of them and I'll probably live longer to boot."





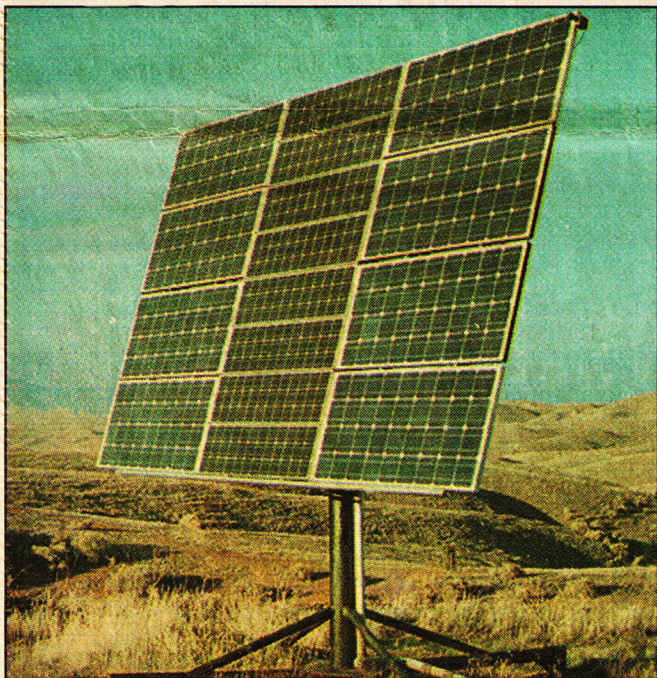


Photo by Jerzy Aust/ Special to the Enterprise

This solar panel is a part of the resort's natural energy sources.

system including a wind turbine and solar panels. Right now, Ronneberg's natural electrical plant can produce nearly enough electricity to operate his current business. But as backup, he also installed a diesel generator. In the future he hopes to install more solar panels in order to make all the electricity he needs using natural sources.

Ronneberg hopes to restore the resort to its past glory and instill a 1920's theme throughout.

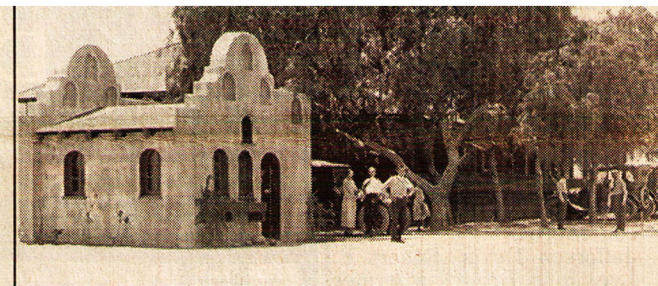
"We've done a lot towards restoring the resort," he said. "However, there's still a tremendous amount of work to be done."

With help from his friends, Ronneberg stripped the cabins from the inside, rebuilding the floors, walls and electrical lines. Now he is doing the same thing to the hotel that is on site. He plans to renovate the entire hotel to include five suites. Each suite will have a bed and sitting area with fireplace, a large bathroom and a private hot tub with water sup-

there to bottle the water that came from the springs because the water was believed to have healing powers.

Another historic building on the site is the Bath House. This house is where the naturally heated water is piped into tubs in private rooms. The tubs provide a place to soak in the mineral water as the rooms heat up like a sauna and fill with steam. Two of the "soaking rooms" have been completely refinished - one in white tile, the other with riverbed rocks from a nearby creek. The Bath House also has the bathroom facilities for guests.

Despite the mid-rebuild condition of parts of the resort, Ronneberg is constantly hosting guests and is inviting anyone to stop by and visit. Visitors can find the resort 13 miles west of Interstate 5 on Little Panoche Road. You can get there by car or fly in and land at their private landing strip. Along with overnight accommodations, the resort offers daily use services to soak in the natural hot springs water.



Photos by Jerzy Aust/ Special to the Enterprise

Above is a picture of Mercey Hot Springs as it looked in the 1920's, and below is what it looks like now.

