

## Railroad Avenue upgrades continue in Pittsburg

Merchants, customers have to wait a few more months before downtown gets 'red carpet' treatment

By Paul Burgarino

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Road Construction: 5th and Railroad Ave.

### Pittsburg:

If Chris Lanzafame looks out of his furniture store on Railroad Avenue in Old Town Pittsburg this time next year, he may feel the chill of the marina air and see a tree-lined, landscaped street filled with noisy shoppers. On a recent afternoon, he felt the breeze, but saw orange detour cones and the rumble of construction trucks filling in dirt for new utility lines. Downtown merchants and residents will have to deal with construction along Railroad Avenue for a few more months, said city officials and construction crews. "I think things are going as well as can be expected; there have been times when it's tough," Lanzafame said, noting that the economy could also be affecting sales at his 93-year old business, Lanzafame Furniture Co. The main road of Pittsburg's downtown is in the process of an \$8 million improvement project, part of the city's plan to shape the area into a regional destination conducive to foot traffic. When work is done, the three-

block stretch of Railroad Avenue from Fifth to Eighth streets will have new water, sewer and storm drain lines, as well as palm trees, planters and decorative brick paving on its sidewalks.

The stretch will also have ornamental streetlights and raised crosswalks. The project is a joint venture along with Vidrio, a multimillion-dollar redevelopment project with planned townhomes on upper floors and retail planned for the ground level. Both projects are being built jointly by Oakland-based AF Evans Development Inc. The hope is to have both opened, as a "red carpet" to the revamped Old Town Pittsburg area, in time for the Seafood Festival, Pittsburg's signature event, said Muhammad Nadhiri, the firm's project manager. "So far, everything has been progressing fine, things are largely on time and on budget," Nadhiri said. AF Evans crews are working on finishing underground utility work soon, with the actual

streetscape work starting in April. The company ran into an unexpected snag, when it discovered the sewer lines and utilities underneath the area were older than anticipated, thus taking longer to

replace. "That's when people will start to notice what Railroad will look like," said Paul Reinders, a city engineer in the traffic division. Some businesses said that they hear an occasional frustration, but by and large most people who want to go to their shop find a way to get there

Store owners say they are looking forward to Pittsburg going back to normal. Caviar wholesaler Mark Bolourchi, who owns retail shop Palace of Fine Foods said, "We understand the prize in the future is going to be great, but yes, for the short term, it's affecting our retail business." Some merchants, like Reyna Zepeda, who runs Reynita Restaurant with her husband, Wilfredo, say they are at a disadvantage because they only have one entrance facing Railroad. When construction first started, she feared "people may go somewhere else to eat." Both directions of Railroad Avenue will be open at the end of each workday and on weekends, he said, and street closures will be made with access to businesses in mind. Work is scheduled to take place 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, excluding holidays. Some businesses have adjusted their hours of operation as a result. All sidewalks on both sides of the street will remain open, and parking will be available in public lots at Fifth, Sixth and Eighth streets and on side streets off Railroad Avenue. Reinders said he appreciates the community's patience during the project and asked that anyone with questions, comments or concerns about the project contact Pittsburg civil engineer Richard Abono at 925-252-4930.

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