

Corporation formed to take over camp's housing

BY ROD THOMPSON
Big Island correspondent

HONOKAA, Hawaii — Hamakua Sugar worker Mel Mason isn't bubbling over with pride in his plantation camp house.

"The home's not worth a plug nickel," he said. "Lucky we have strong termites."

But a home is a home, Mason feels, and rent has been cheap — about \$40 a month. The house is worthless, but the land can be used as a site for a new house, he said.

Company-owned houses are only part of the assets of the company that will grind its last cane Saturday.

On Monday, Bishop Estate bought the bulk of Hamakua Sugar's land, 30,500 acres, saying possible uses for it are diversified agriculture, pasture and timber.

Hamakua trustee John Goss has a list of other assets he must dispose of, including the mill, which will be auctioned as a unit, he said.

Goss described the condition of the 405 plantation homes under his control as "poor to worse."

The Hamakua Housing Corp. was formed last year to take over ownership of the homes and land from Hamakua Sugar. It begins managing the plantation camps Saturday and gets ownership later, said housing consultant Brian

Nishimura.

Goss is in the process of having the county subdivide the camp lands from surrounding agricultural lands, Nishimura said. House lots will be subdivided within the camps later and individuals will get ownership, he said.

As for the mill, the buyer will dismantle it and probably take it to another country to set up again.

Selling the mill as a valuable unit instead of less-valuable parts is possible because Hamakua did a final harvest after the company closed in March 1993. "The mill wasn't in running condition when we took over," Goss said.

Repairing the mill for the final harvest added considerably to the

money that will go to lender Western Farm Credit Bank, he said.

Enserch Corp. of Dallas is planning a new, 60-megawatt power plant next to the mill.

Mayor Stephen Yamashiro repeated his position yesterday that the area from Honokaa southeast to Laupahoehoe should remain in agriculture, but added that the area from Honokaa northwest to Waipio Valley might be appropriate for some urbanization.

Goss said the former Ookala Mill site, with asbestos and oil spills around it, has to be cleaned before it can be sold. That means he will still be on the job after the shutdown. "It'll be low-profile, but I'll be around for a while."



BY ROD THOMPSON, Star-Bulletin

Hamakua Sugar's smokestacks will stop for good with its last grind Saturday, leaving truck driver Clarence Kempke, left, out of work.

HAMAKUA: New jobs coming

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Corp. The company is negotiating with Hawaii Electric Light Co. on how much it should be paid for its power, said project manager Jody Allione.

Since federal law requires Helco to buy the power, the likelihood of construction, beginning in November 1995, seems good.

The power plant would provide 20 to 30 jobs, with an additional 10 for truck drivers hauling fuel oil, Allione said.

Enserch would also "co-generate" steam and hot water. It's working with Aurea Marine to set up an aquaculture facility using the hot water to grow fish for sale in Japan.

Enserch doesn't need all of the 679 acres it plans to buy at the

■ Cafe Grinders in Kawaihae, 50 jobs, opening in two weeks.

■ 50-bed Honokaa Hospital, 55 jobs, opening early 1995.

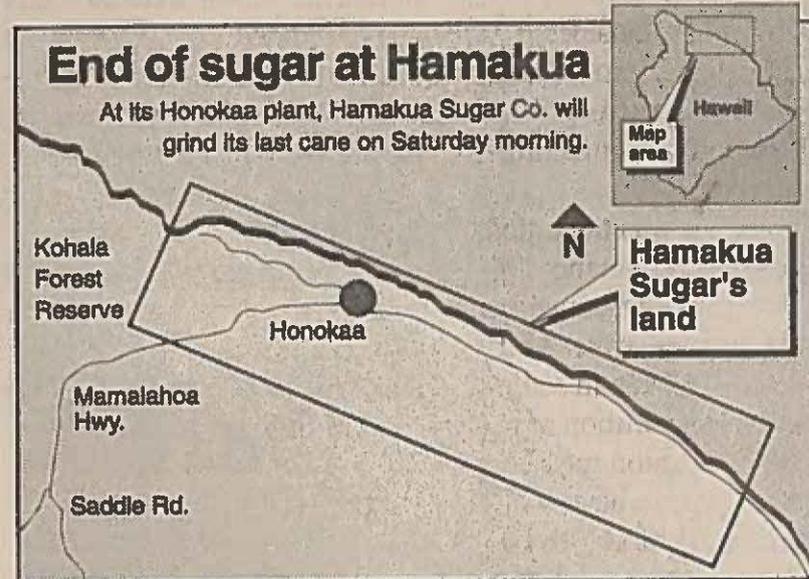
■ Suntera electric car company, numbers uncertain, as the company expands in 1995.

■ Amanresort, 100 jobs, opening 1996.

Agriculture, which practically everyone agrees should be preserved and fostered, offers greater uncertainties.

A Hamakua/North Hilo Agricultural Cooperative has been started, but only 443 acres have been made available to its members. Proposed projects would require nearly 9,740 acres.

A key question is what will happen to the Lower Hamakua Ditch, which supplied irrigation



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reasonable estimate of about last harvest. They also get a share

For Hamakua Sugar, the end is a grind

■ But many hope the mill's finale Saturday will kick off renewal

BY ROD THOMPSON 9/27/94
Big Island correspondent

HONOKAA, Hawaii — Hamakua Sugar Co. — declared bankrupt two years ago, shut down last year and then restarted — will grind its last sugar cane Saturday morning.

It's the end of the 117-year-old company, which began near Ookala in 1877.

But many see the closing as one step in the renewal of the Hamakua Coast and the adjoining Hilo Coast where the 124-year-old Hilo

Coast Processing Co. closed four weeks ago.

"It's the first step in rejuvenation of the Hamakua area," said bankruptcy trustee John Goss. "Hamakua died when they filed for bankruptcy."

Clinton Fernandez, company inventory control supervisor, said, "It's going to be a lot of change, but maybe it's going to be for the better."

Augusto Gancinia, part of the "warehouse ohana" with Fernandez, said, "It's nice to take an adventure, maybe do something entirely different."

Many workers have signed up for retraining programs put in place since last year's shutdown.

Mel Mason, a boiler operator, has signed up for a course in landscaping and golf course maintenance but isn't confident about the future. "I don't know if there's going to be a job. There's not enough golf courses. Everybody can't be a landscaper."

About 1,200 sugar jobs are being lost in the area over a two-year period, a state study said, about 414 in the current round at Hamakua.

But 170 have found new jobs and other new jobs are coming, said Rep. Dwight Takamine.

One of the biggest potential sources of jobs is the 60-megawatt power plant planned by Enserch

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