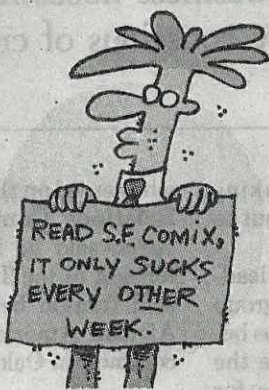


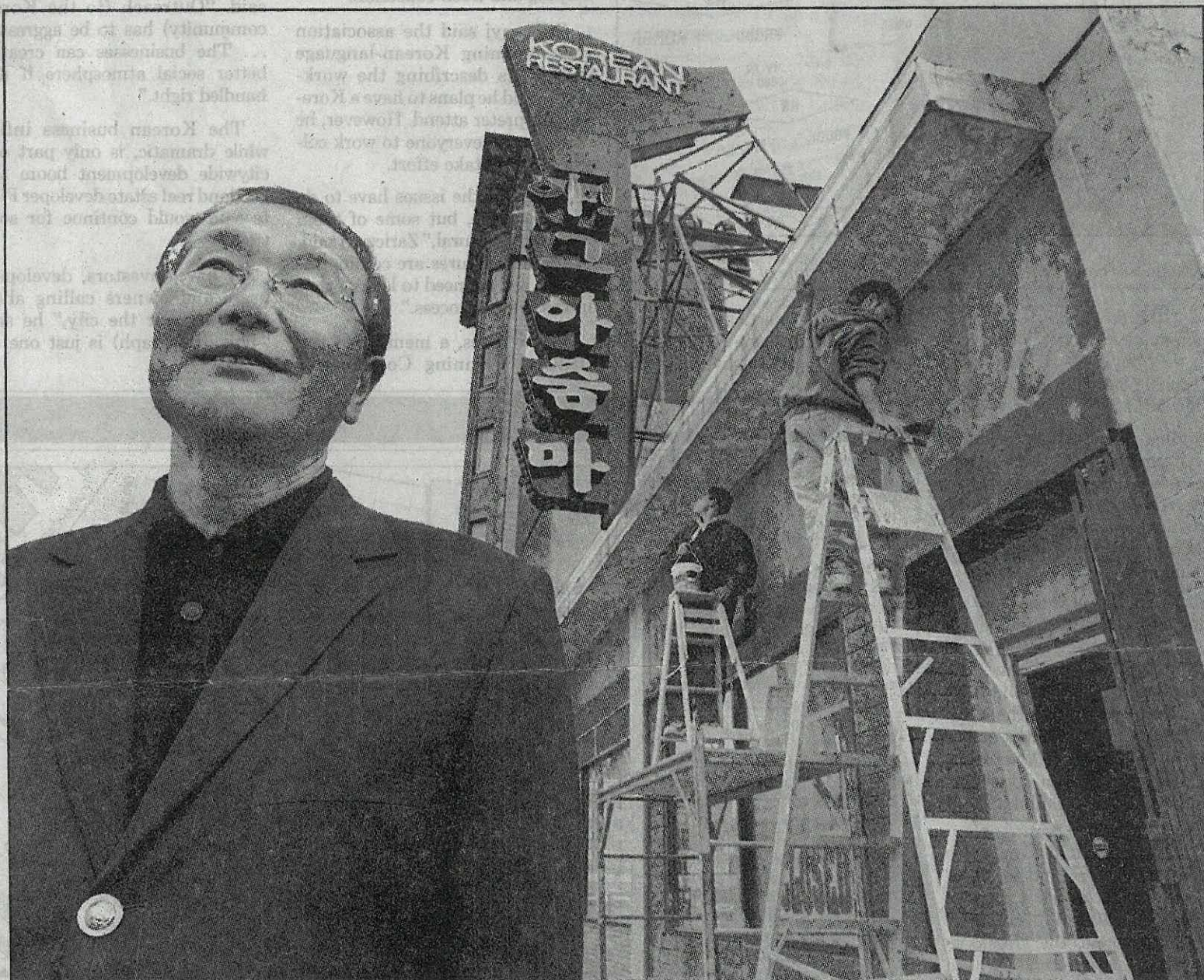
San Francisco Comic Strip

Intrepid cartoonist Don Asmussen is taking the week off. The cartoon will return next week.



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EXAMINER PHOTOS BY PAUL CHINN

Real estate developer Alex Hahn bought properties on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland and lured Korean businesses to them.

An Oakland Korea town rising

Businessman leads the way for ethnic shops in the Telegraph-Northgate area

By Robert Selna

SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

OAKLAND — Since he moved to the East Bay from his native Korea in the mid-1970s, Alex Hahn has envisioned a thriving Korea town in Oakland. That dream may soon become a reality.

In the past three years, more than 15 Korean-owned businesses have sprung up in Oakland's Telegraph-Northgate area, a 10-block zone of retail, residential and warehouse space situated just off Interstate 980 and a stone's throw from downtown.

The fledgling Korea town is a prime example of Mayor Jerry Brown's vision for the city's oft-specified economic renaissance. During his inauguration, Brown made a plea for residents and businesses to revitalize the city by making it their home.

Hahn is leading the way. Sitting at his desk in the cavernous former I. Magnin department store he now owns in downtown



Pusan Plaza market on Telegraph Avenue in the fast-growing Korea town carries a huge assortment of Korean products

Oakland, Hahn listed the reasons why Koreans were flocking to the once greatly maligned city.

"Oakland is getting better," Hahn said. "It is becoming safer. . . . The rents are lower than most places in the Bay Area. And the numbers of Koreans are growing every year in the Bay Area."

Six years ago, the Telegraph-Northgate area languished desolate and blighted. Sears, its longtime signature tenant, had abandoned the neighborhood after operating for more than 60 years. Property damage from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake led to a decline in retail business. When Sears shut down, many other

retailers followed, citing the area's decreased foot traffic and increasing crime rate.

But where some saw an example of urban decay, others saw opportunity. The retail exodus left many vacant storefronts with ever-

[See KOREAN, D-2