

Daily Breeze

Out with the old, in with The Vue

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By Dennis Lin

SAN PEDRO: Rigged with explosives, the Pacific Trade Center goes down to make way for condos.

Like a felled tree, San Pedro's Pacific Trade Center teetered to earth early Sunday morning.

A burst of black smoke from the roof, a startling boom of noise and a ground-shaking rumble felt miles away were all that signaled the building's demise. Hundreds of people who gathered around the building's restricted perimeter cheered as it fell.

Twenty-five pounds of carefully placed explosives hacked away at the 11-story office building's two support beams, according to Larry Voight with Dykon Explosive Demolition. A separate charge split an iron beam at the structure's top that had held the complex's east and west halves together.

Without its supporting beams, the east half of the building crumpled toward the ground. A second later the west half followed and crushed the eastern half under its weight. Both fell east toward the harbor.

A cloud of dust hung over the fallen building and colored the sun's early morning rays as a fiery orange hue. Most of the building was already gutted to remove asbestos, glass, other loose items and to keep the dust to a minimum. Strings of steel reinforcing bars and broken slabs of concrete hung from the structure's base like roots and dirt from a fallen tree.

The building's demolition will make way for the 16-story Vue condominium development, the largest project in downtown San Pedro. Los Angeles Councilwoman Janice Hahn said the building's demise in favor of the \$175 million, 318-unit high-rise condominium was symbolic of San Pedro's future. "It's another example of San Pedro's transition into a vibrant, highly desirable place to live," Hahn said. She had pushed the button that lit the explosives and sent the building tumbling.

Before crews break apart and remove the remains, the Los Angeles Fire Department's Urban Search and Rescue teams will practice scouring through the rubble for victims, Hahn said. The entire rubble will be cleared within 45 to 60 days, according to Gail Schlicht, assistant manager of project developer Galaxy Commercial Holdings.

Controlled demolitions are a rare sight in Los Angeles – the last building to succumb to such a fate fell 12 years ago, Hahn’s office said, Neighbors of 225 W. Fifth St. – whole families, elderly couples, college students and an entire party of people who stayed awake through the night – stood at the demolition’s edge to see the pyrotechnics. Most said they came to see in person what they had only seen on television before.

“I’m the kind of person who would wake up in the middle of the night to see a comet, eclipse or some other really rare moment,” said Winston Clinton.