

Daily Journal OF Commerce

MONDAY, APRIL 2, 1990

VOL. 174, NO. 66

INSIDE

- Wieden & Kennedy wins honors —Page 3
- GAO finds immigration law sparks discrimination —Page 5
- AGC Construction News Update —Pages 17-23

'Trade summit' examines wood quality, tariff issues



Oregon congressman Ron Wieden, right, led a group that included Japanese diplomats and U.S. plywood industry officials on a tour of the Linnton Plywood Association facility Friday. The "softwood summit" explored U.S. wood quality issues and Japanese barriers to wood imports. Also pictured, from left to right, are Akira Watanabe, Japanese consul general to Oregon; Tom Fack, director of international relations for the American Plywood Association; and Dale Rupp, safety director for the Linnton Plywood Association.

By KRISTINA BRENNEMAN

Oregon congressman Ron Wieden led his own summit Friday on Japanese import restrictions against wood products, involving Japan's annual general to Oregon for a limited plywood sale to get the best price for softwood wood products, and to pass the word to his country's trade negotiators.

U.S. trade officials estimate the United States is losing \$1 billion to \$2 billion a year in potential sales because of Japan's plywood import restrictions. Oregon wood products companies say they are blocked from access to the Japanese market by high tariffs and excessive barriers such as stringent quality requirements and inspections.

Akira Watanabe, Japan's consul general, said he has been aware of the complaints but had yet to visit a Northwest plywood plant.

Trade negotiations between Japanese and American representatives, called the Super 301 process, are under way in Washington, D.C., and Japan set a June 15 deadline for resolving trade terms.

Did that mean there is added pressure to resolve certain trade issues and head off the prospect for U.S. retaliation that would harm Japanese companies for the Northwest, Wieden said. The latest estimate of the U.S. trade deficit with Japan stands at about \$2.9 billion, the lowest since \$2 billion in December 1984.

"It's a nice sensitive issue," said Wieden, during a half-hour tour of the Linnton Plywood Association plant that produces 100 million feet of structural plywood a year. "This is one of the key economic issues in the Northwest. We're trying to squeeze every bit of value out of our timber assets. Linnton has been a product to market."

Of pressing concern to the negotiators is the quality of U.S. plywood and the ability of U.S. plywood manufacturers to meet code requirements for substandard equipment and fire, Wieden said.

Japan imposes tariffs of 26 percent on rough wood products, and up to 15 percent for finished wood.

See D30001, Page 26

LA firm eyes purchase of apartments

By KRISTINA BRENNEMAN

A Los Angeles real estate development company has stepped in to purchase the Everett Street apartments, only days before the city sought to tear down the fire-damaged building.

CTC Management plans to spend \$370,000 to rebuild the 18-unit structure and return its charred brick exterior to tip-top shape, said Perry Raanan, company president. Construction would be complete within six months.

"This is a beautiful building, we'd love to save it," said Raanan. "I was surprised the city was going to tear it down."

Attached to Portland's charm, CTC intends to acquire several local apartment buildings and open an office in the metropolitan area, he said.

City inspectors sought the Everett Street demolition order after San Francisco owner Jonathan Bulkley hedged on adequately protecting the building and initiating repairs following a fire in January, according to building inspector John Duckworth.

Bulkley was given until April 9 to launch demolition, although the city has since extended the deadline and plans a hearing on the issue April 4.

"If the building can be saved, we're all for it," Duckworth said. "We're not in the business of tearing down buildings."

Sale of the Everett Street property, located at 2019 N.W. Everett St. adjacent to the Fred Meyer Stadium store, is contingent on the outcome of the hearing, Raanan said. The city's buildings bureau is asking CTC to bring forward proof of ownership, liability insurance and to post a construction bond, which Raanan says the company has already obtained. Mackenzie/Saito & Associates have been hired to analyze the structure for repair.

The Southern California company, which develops office buildings, apartments and upscale single-family homes, intends to open a Portland branch office soon, Raanan noted.

He said he has been looking to invest in the metropolitan area for years before forging ahead with the Everett Street purchase and initiating offers on three other Portland apartment buildings. The sales agreements are pending.

CTC also is investigating the Skyline area for construction of high-end single family homes, Raanan said.

ONRC challenges timber compromise provision

By DAN McILLIAN

The Oregon National Resources Council is challenging a U.S. Forest Service compromise provision to land timber protection for about 100,000 acres of timberland in the state.

Jack Lee, ONRC director of conservation, said Friday that the provision is "a major step back" for the timber industry.

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Raanan said the Northwest section of the city, with its early-20th century brick buildings, has the same charm as many European cities.

Portland "has a charm you don't find in too many American cities," he said. "They've kept it, unlike other cities, and they have direction and planning."