

Gav ram falls prey to decay

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By Lori Stuenkel

GILROY – The Gavilan College mascot is crumbling. The 36-year-old, 6-foot high ram statue that stands within sight of Gavilan President Steve Kinsella's office will come down in a month.

"He's at the end of his days, I think," Gavilan President Steve Kinsella said.

Bill Dore, a Hollister resident who is starting his second year in Gavilan's health sciences program, said he recently found out the ram, made of concrete and fiberglass, is in bad shape, while visiting the campus with his daughter.

"I walked by the ram, and it's all taped off. It's kind of sad," Dore said.

But at the sight of Gavilan's stately mascot, Dore's daughter was prompted to recall her own school's mascot and the symbolism behind it.

"I think it's kind of important, in a way, to have your mascot up where people can see it," Dore said.

Gavilan officials say the ram must come down. Cracks pierce his sides and he appears to be crumbling away. They don't think he'll survive another winter, even a mild Gilroy winter. The college's maintenance department says he's becoming a liability.

"The problem is, it wasn't built out of long-term, durable materials," said Jan Bernstein Chargin, Gavilan spokeswoman, who broke the news of the ram's demise to Gavilan trustees during a recent board meeting.

The concrete ram was built on commission by then-Gavilan art student Chris Stuker in 1968. Stuker and art department head John Porter designed the ram after studying ancient cave paintings, sculptures of Henry Moore and articles and pictures of long horn and other breeds of sheep, according to a Dispatch article published June 18, 1968. The ram was finished in fiberglass with an antique bronze appearance and mounted on stone just past the western edge of the administration parking lot, looking toward campus.

Gavilan College unveiled its mascot replica just in time for its first graduation ceremony at the campus on Santa Teresa Boulevard.

In an attempt to salvage the ram, Chargin brought Stuker to campus to see if he could somehow repair it, but he agreed that the ram is beyond repair. He also noticed its horns are not the ones he originally created.

"It's not something that we would remove lightly," Chargin said. "If there was any way to not do this, I would have been the first one to pull that out, but I haven't found it.

"We don't want to let this go without a fitting ceremony."

Staff, students and members of the community can see the ram come down at 3 p.m. on Aug. 13, the first day Gavilan staff return to campus.

Gavilan Hollister-area Trustee Tom Breen said that, while it's unfortunate the ram will come down, it is, after all, only a symbol.

"Unfortunately, like all of us, its end has come," Breen said. "It's the institution's animal, so the rams will go on. Maybe when we get the place (rehabilitated), we'll get the ram rehabilitated as well."

Knocking him down should yield a glimpse into Gavilan's past: Stuker said he placed a time capsule in the statue and, from what he can tell, it's still there, Chargin said.

"Where was it?" asked Simon Cooke, last year's Associated Student Body President, who attended the Gavilan board meeting last week.

"It was in the, um, back end portion," responded a smiling Chargin.

Dore, the Gavilan student, doesn't want Gavilan to be without a prominent mascot.

"If they're going to get rid of it, they should at least replace it," he said.

Kinsella said there are no plans as yet for a replacement ram.

"I think it's safe to say we want to have something, but collectively, we haven't talked about it yet," he said.