

Hawthorne: 'Once a nice place to live'

By **KERRY WEBSTER**
TNT Staff Writer

It is the kind of neighborhood usually described as "blighted," or, more politely, "in decline."

There are old houses in the last stages of decay, rusting cars in the side yards, boarded-up grocery stores on the corners.

"Once, this was a nice place to live," said Harold Boss, 512 E. 28th St., a retired feed mill worker. "Now, you lock your doors just to carry out the garbage."

The Hawthorne neighborhood, almost everyone agrees, is pretty far gone. The school is closed, the fire station empty. The roar of the freeway, knifing through the neighborhood on one side, blends with the clatter of industry approaching on the other.

It also is the leading site for Tacoma's proposed minidome.

Experts are enthusiastic about the site. It's close to downtown, close to City Waterway and within easy access to the freeway. With 67 acres to choose from, there's plenty of space for parking.

"**BUT THERE ARE** people in those houses," says Mrs. Muriel Hewitt, who has a business on East 26th Street. "Old people, poor people, retired people. Where do they go?"

"Some of us have lived here for 30 or 40 years," she adds. "It may not be as nice as it used to be, but it's still home."

The Hawthorne area was one of Tacoma's first working-class neighborhoods, literally carved out of the woods at the foot of McKinley Hill in the early 1880s.

The first residents were the immigrant Germans, Russians and Swedes who came to run the sawmills and load the ships of the burgeoning new port city. Later came the trainmen of the Northern Pacific and the Milwaukee Road.

"When they needed extra crews on the trains, the railroads used to send

messenger boys up and down the streets, banging on doors," said Dean Bellamy, a longtime resident. "In half an hour, they could have enough men to run a dozen trains."

THE ORIGINAL houses, many of which survive, are classic examples of what historians call "carpenter gothic" — tall, thin, boxlike, with ornamented porch lintels and plain, tongue-and-groove siding. Many were built by the first occupants themselves, with wood cut locally and sawed in waterfront mills.

One of Tacoma's earliest architects, Carl August Darmer, who built many of the grander homes in the North End, built his own house in the Hawthorne area. It still stands on East D Street.

For most of a century, the Hawthorne area was a pleasant residential neighborhood, despite its proximity to industry. But East 26th Street became Highway 99, and Interstate 5 came in the mid 60s.

"It started going downhill when the freeway came," said Mrs. Hewitt. "A lot of the houses were sold as rentals, and they started running down. All of a sudden there was crime, vandalism, burglary — things we never had to worry about before."

A **CITY SURVEY** taken in 1975 showed about 325 people living in the Hawthorne neighborhood. There are more now, because some apartment houses have gone up.

About half are renters, half owners. Almost a third are retired, another 20 per cent are unemployed. Average household income is low, about \$10,000 a year. Many residents are black or Indian.

W. M. Jones, 60, remembers when East C Street had wooden decking. His house at 301 E. 30th St. is old, but well-kept, with a beautiful old stone chimney.

"I guess I wouldn't mind losing my

house if they relocated me," he said this week. "I never did believe in standing in the way of progress. But I'd want to make sure they were going to treat me right."

THAT'S A BIG worry in the Hawthorne neighborhood.

Most of the houses that would be destroyed are big, old and spacious. Some are classics built before the turn of the century. But because they are in a "blighted" area, their fair market value is considerably lower than similar houses elsewhere.

"Mayor Parker says we are going to get fair market value," said Sherry Cromwell, who owns a home at 417 E. 29th St. "But is it really going to do us

any good?"

"My real estate agent says my house is only worth about \$30,000, because of the neighborhood, but if I wanted to buy one just like it in any other area, it would cost me \$50,000."

Public Works Director Ron Button has said federal law would require the city to relocate residents in homes valued up to \$15,000 more than the houses they lose.

But many residents say frankly they trust the city about as far as they could throw a minidome.

"That kid mayor is full of more surprises than a grab bag," grumbles Harold Boss. "We could end up without enough money to buy a night in the Carlton Hotel."

Neighbors say some of the absentee landlords in the area are throwing quick coats of paint on their rental houses in the hope of raising their appraisal value.

"We'd do the same thing, but nobody will give us a loan," said Fred Kennedy. "Since the minidome thing came along, no bank will touch us with a 10-foot pole."

MOST NOTICEABLE since the minidome announcement this summer has been a spate of apartment-house construction in the area. Three new apartment houses have gone up this fall, and two more are under construction.

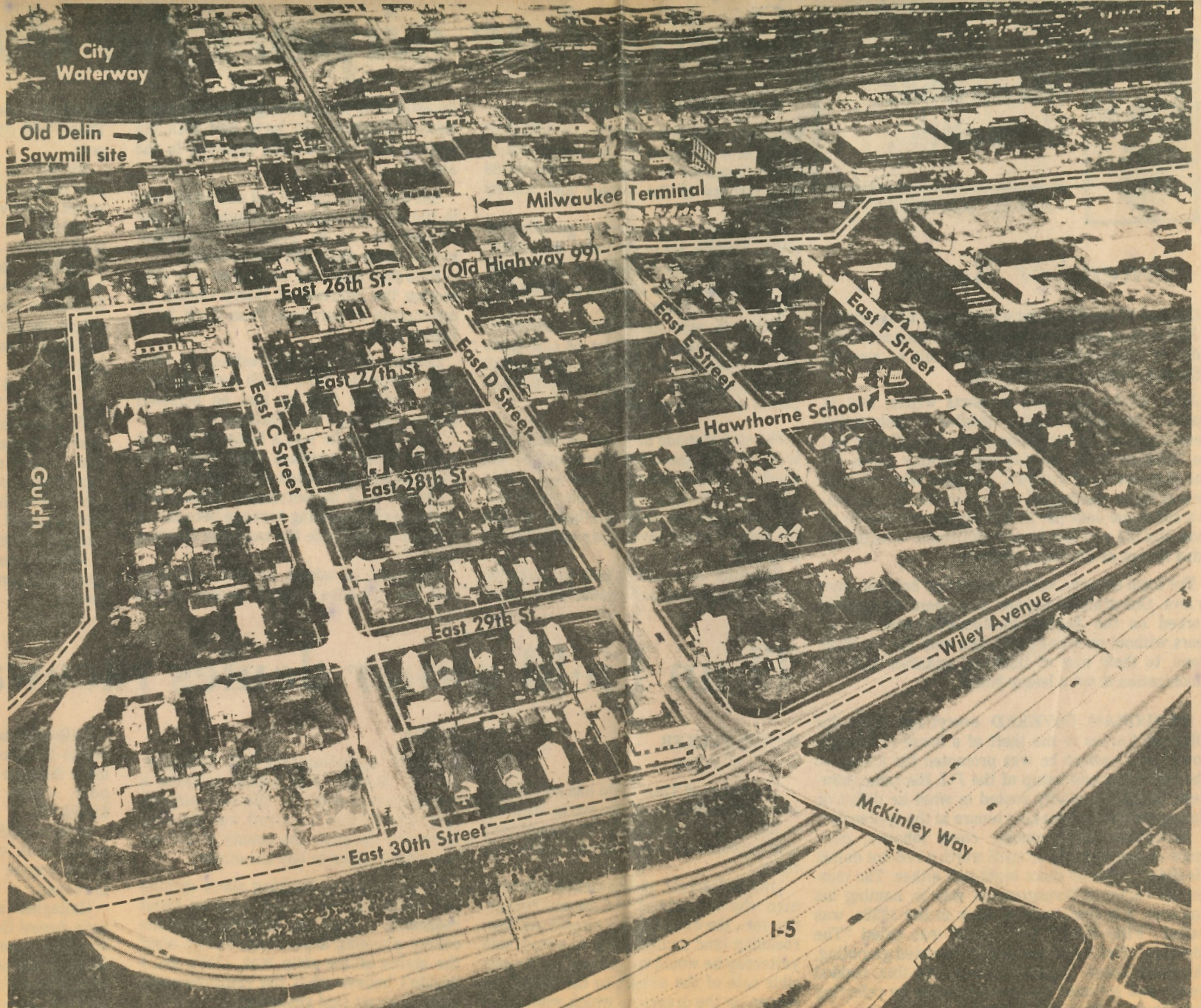
"They're working seven days a

week to get those things up in time to get 'em tore down," chuckled W.M. Jones.

Sherry Cromwell tells of two lots near her home that changed hands twice in the same day, at a profit of \$10,000 each time. Most of the Hawthorne residents have received letters and phone calls from real estate brokers offering to buy their houses.

Almost all of them, however, have decided to sit and wait to see what kind of a deal the city will offer.

"If the city really needs that minidome, and if that's what the people want, why, we're willing to sell," says Boss. "We just don't want to come out on the short end."



Hawthorne: sandwiched between the freeway and industry