

CONRA COSTA TIMES

Condo parking problem gets a lift

- **WALNUT CREEK: Father-son development team installs system that works much like an elevator for cars**

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With parking in Walnut Creek getting tighter and the cost of land skyrocketing, developers are looking for innovative ways to fit more cars and residents into smaller spaces.



-Parking lifts have been installed at the new Iron Horse Place in Walnut Creek. With parking getting tighter in Walnut Creek and the cost of land for developers skyrocketing, the city of Walnut Creek is seeing its first at parking lifts. (Dan Rosenstrauch/Staff)

The father-son development team of Pat and Sean Joy from Orinda is betting that what works in urban areas such as Berkeley and San Francisco will catch on in the Contra Costa County suburbs.

They've installed Walnut Creek's first "parking lift" system -- which works much like an elevator for cars -- in their new Iron Horse Place condo development on Creekside Drive.



-Iron Horse Place in Walnut Creek has installed lifts to create more parking space. (Dan Rosenstrauch/Staff)

"We installed them because land is valuable and land is scarce," Sean Joy said.

Walnut Creek architect Joe Bologna and his partner designed the Klaus Parking System lifts into the project's ground-floor garage to help accommodate 48 parking spaces on one level. About 30 cars will park in "lift" spaces, which move up or down when a button is pushed.

"Most people build two stories of parking underneath the building," Bologna said. "If you use lifts, you only have to build one level of parking. That's just a huge savings of resources and time."

Instead of digging down 12 feet to construct one floor of underground parking, the Joys excavated 6-foot deep pits below the lifts. When the lifts are lowered into the ground, cars can drive onto the top level spaces.

To retrieve cars from the bottom of the double-decker lifts, condo owners will push a button and raise the top cars 6 feet into the air, revealing vehicles that have been stored below ground. It takes about 45 seconds to elevate the cars.

Although it may seem like a hassle to raise and lower cars instead of whizzing in and out of parking spots, developers and project managers who have used the lifts in other cities say they're big fans of the German contraptions.

"I love them," said Patrick Kennedy of the Panoramic Interests development company in Berkeley, who began installing lifts in his projects 12 years ago. "They're a marvelous piece of engineering. They solve a huge headache elegantly, and they make enormous economic and ecological sense."

The double lifts cost about \$9,000 per stall for the equipment and installation. But Patrick Joy estimates the total price is about \$15,000, including excavation and other related costs.

Kennedy said the lifts don't break, and they use very little energy, with a hydraulic system that takes advantage of gravity going down, but uses electricity going up.

And for some people, the lifts have another selling point: They're hip.

Bryant Townsend, who manages the Acton Courtyard apartment building in Berkeley, said his tenants impress their friends with the building's triple-decker lifts that accommodate 74 cars.

"A lot of people haven't ever seen them," Townsend said. "They're amazed. They say, 'How do you get your car out when it's underground?' The tenants love them because they're really cool, and everybody wants the newest thing."

While the lifts are considered unique in American suburbs, they've been around in Europe for 40 years.

"It's called bunk bed parking," said Lafayette distributor Norm Brudigam, who has installed about 1,800 lift stalls in some 100 projects along the West Coast since 1995. "When you have an underground garage, you have to have ramps and driveways. With lifts, you're really compacting the parking much more by using a single access off the street."

The Iron Horse Condos went on the market last weekend, and one of the 26 units has already sold. But it remains to be seen whether more Walnut Creek residents will embrace the urban technology

The Joys hope potential buyers will appreciate the lifts, as well as other amenities they have provided in the project, including bike racks, oak trees, a fountain and natural light. Even Patrick's wife, Martha Jean Joy (after whom the family's MJJ Construction company is named), has helped out with such things as sweeping sand between the driveway pavers.

City planner Scott Harriman said the project received an "A+" rating from the engineering inspector because of its attention to detail.

"They have adopted it as a family project," Harriman said, after watching the trio working together. "They're a pretty strong team."