

# Buffums building to reopen as probation department office

By Dina Heredia  
The Register

SANTA ANA — Almost a year after it closed, the downtown Buffums department store building will reopen. But the nameplate at 909 N. Main St. now reads "County of Orange Probation Department."

The county has signed a 20-year lease with the owner, Hutton Development Co. The county has an option to buy the property for about \$8.8 million at any time during the lease. The purchase price may vary depending on whether improvements are made.

More than 280 Probation Department employees will settle where shoppers once bought clothing and gifts and diners passed on their way to the Yorba Room restaurant.

The department's administrative division — including Chief Probation Officer Michael Schumacher — and its adult-services divisions in Santa Ana and Orange will begin moving to the 104,000-square-foot, two-story building Saturday, Margaret Bell, a senior analyst for the department, said.

Bell said the move will take about three weekends. An open house is scheduled for Jan. 9 though the move will not be complete.

The department will use 60,000 square feet, and the rest will be used by other county departments involved in criminal justice, said Bob Love, deputy director of the county's General Services Agency.

He said the county would not move jail facilities there.

No decision has been made on which departments will be moved or on a timetable for the move, Love said.

Hutton Development bought the property from the Buffums chain, based in Long Beach, in September 1987.

To many, the Santa Ana store had been the premiere retail operation in the county when it opened in 1950. But Buffums closed the store Jan. 31, after it determined the downtown location could not compete with MainPlace, which opened in late 1987, and other renovated malls.

When the decision to close the Santa Ana store was announced, Buffums management estimated that its business dropped 20 percent to 25 percent when MainPlace opened, and that it would have had to invest \$3 million in the store to compete with other shopping malls. Gary Isaac, a Hutton Development vice president, said the county signed the lease in July.

Greg Aardema, a real-estate agent in the General Services Agency, said the county will pay \$62,000 a month to lease the renovated building and the 327-space parking lot on the 3.7-acre site.

Love said the county chose the site because of its proximity to the Civic Center — it is three blocks away.

He called it a good value because the county could convert the building for its use and add to the property.

Isaac said Hutton Development liked the idea of a steady, long-term lease — "a conservative investment" for the company's portfolio.

Love said the county is considering similar deals with private companies. He said the county would allow a company to build to county specifications on county land so the county could lease the facility.

He said such private ventures might help ease budget concerns.

Supervisors are looking at spending cuts because of an expected 1988-89 budget deficit. Some county agencies overestimated late 1988 revenue by a total of \$15 million to \$20 million, county officials said.

Love would not say which county lands are being considered for private development.

Love said the agreement would not be affected by a proposed budget freeze because it is already complete and because the building is needed to relieve overcrowding and provide space for construction at so-called Manchester complex on The City Drive between Chapman Avenue and Garden Grove Boulevard.

Construction is to start in two months on the \$89 million project, which will include a seven-story



The old Buffums store on Main Street in Santa Ana has been transformed into a probation department office. Mark Rightmire/The Register

family- and juvenile-court building, two parking structures and an expansion of the Theo Lacy jail and juvenile hall buildings.

Hutton Development is one of four or five companies offering to build an Orange County's Sheriff's Department forensics laboratory at Flower Street and Santa Ana Boulevard, Love said.

John Robinson, chief deputy probation officer, said the consolida-

tion of the Santa Ana and Orange probation offices will not affect field offices in Anaheim, Westminster or the south county.

Isaac said the company began

remodeling the store's two floors and basement in September, sometimes using part of the stone walls as paneling and using display windows to augment room lighting.