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Back on EBay: The Little Town That Couldn't Stay Sold

Tiny Bridgeville, Calif., was bought in 2004 by a financial broker, but it's on the market again.

By Roy Rivenburg, Times Staff Writer
March 20, 2006

Four years after becoming the first town auctioned on EBay, tiny Bridgeville, Calif., is once again for sale on the website.

Bruce Krall, a Laguna Hills financial broker who bought the 83-acre hamlet for \$700,000, is seeking a minimum bid of \$1.75 million for the riverfront property.

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Duzen River, 260 miles north of San Francisco on a two-lane highway that twists through redwood forests. About two dozen people live in the town, which has no grocery store, gas station or restaurant.

Krall said Sunday that he had wanted to turn Bridgeville into a retreat center, but family issues forced him to abandon the effort just days after he got building permits.

He said he spent several hundred thousand dollars sprucing up the town — hauling away junk, demolishing dilapidated buildings and refurbishing others.

"It looks really nice," Gloria Barnwell, who operates a ranch about five miles from Bridgeville, said Sunday.

But Krall had trouble finding tenants for the town's seven rental units because there were no jobs in the area, Shuman said.

An ad on EBay says Bridgeville could be converted into a college campus, ranch or small resort. "Or you could re-create your own working town," the ad suggests. "This truly is beautiful country, just outside of the fog zone where the majestic 'old growth' redwoods stand."

Bridgeville's previous owner, antique dealer Elizabeth Lapple, bought it three decades ago for \$150,000 via a classified ad in The Times. She sold it to a religious group in 1977, then took over again after the group couldn't keep up with payments.

Her family tried to unload the town again in 2002, first through conventional real estate channels, then on EBay.

Online offers poured in from as far away as Iceland and Germany.

One bidder, a Texan, wanted to turn Bridgeville into a brothel. Another jokingly asked, "How much for shipping?"

The winning bid was \$1.78 million, but the buyer backed out after visiting the town and seeing how run-down it was. Subsequent deals also fizzled until Krall came along in 2004.

Some residents were baffled by all the attention their town received. "I don't know why the fella bought it in the first place," Shuman said.

But other locals contend Bridgeville has potential. "It's very picturesque ... but it's going to take the right person, some money and commitment," resident Wanda Adams said.

Included in the deal are three cows, a 136-year-old post office building, a vacant cafe and a cemetery that purportedly contains the grave of the last white man killed by Native Americans in Humboldt County. Bidding is set to begin April 4.

This is the third time that Bridgeville has been put up for sale in recent years.

"It's kinda like the town that nobody wants," said Mel Shuman, who runs a nearby cattle ranch.

Founded in 1865 by a trapper named Slaughter Robinson, Bridgeville is nestled along the Van

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Krall is optimistic that moguls will line up for a chance to own the former logging town about an hour southeast of Eureka. "Finding riverfront property for sale in California is rare," he said.

An auction company is prescreening bidders to avoid the snafus that occurred during the 2002 EBay offer.

What will Krall do if nobody offers the minimum bid?

"That's a good question," he said.

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