

Money troubles threaten 'ecotopia' at Cerro Gordo

Nearly five years after its creation, a community once billed as the ecological model for America may be on the brink of bankruptcy.

Cerro Gordo, a self-supporting community built 20 miles south of Eugene in 1974, is now facing financial problems from unpaid debts approaching \$1 million, and from 200 unhappy investors who have taken their hopes for an ecological Utopia elsewhere, the Eugene Register-Guard reports.

A two-month investigation by the newspaper published Saturday and Sunday said Cerro Gordo's creator, Chris Canfield, is now eight months overdue on a \$76,000 loan from the Suislaw Valley Bank, which is threatening foreclosure on the development.

Canfield, 31, conceived the idea for Cerro Gordo eight years ago while living in Santa Barbara, Calif. The community was supposed to be a small, energy-efficient and ecological village where cars wouldn't be allowed and the residents would live off the land around them.

After an advertising campaign netted several thousand dollars for the venture, Canfield purchased a 1,158-acre site on the shore of Dorena Lake, southeast of Cottage Grove.

Although the community was to house 2,000 people, only 30 families are still dedicated to the idea.

Canfield's financial problems have been compounded by a lack of cash to refinance the project, slow land-use planning by the Lane County government and investors who have "meddled" in the development, he said.

Canfield, who has invested more than \$60,000 of his own money in the project according to the Saturday account, said he may be the biggest loser if the community fails. (Canfield later said his investment was closer to \$40,000.)

Nearly \$800,000 of Cerro Gordo's debt will have to be paid by Canfield in the event of bankruptcy.



Unpaid debts may bring foreclosure on houses such as this one in Cerro Gordo, a "model" community development 20 miles south of Eugene. Emerald photo

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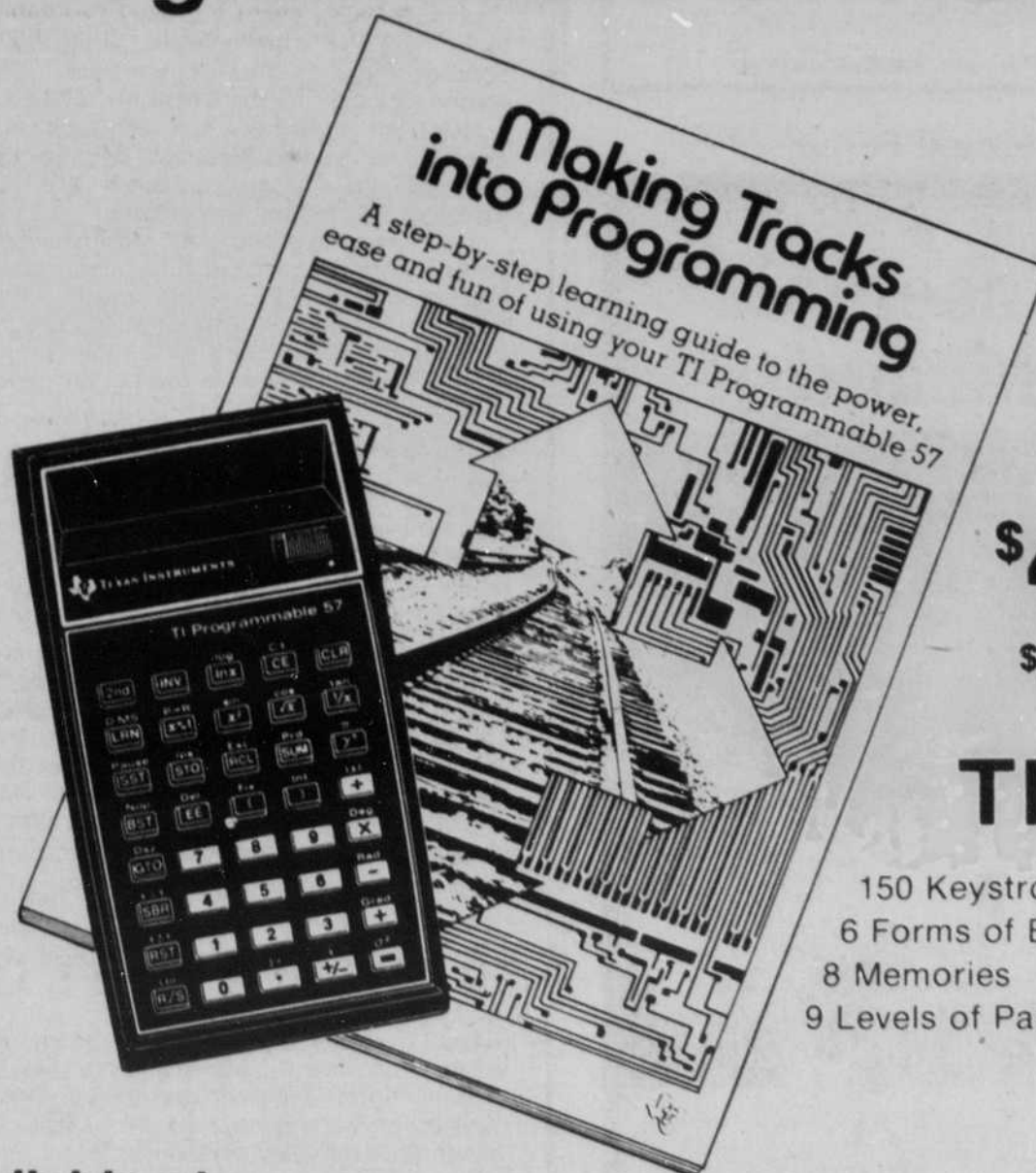
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