

'Escape California' industry rises in wake of quake



LOS ANGELES (AP) — William L. Seavey's crusade can be summed up with his toll-free number: 1-800-ESCAPE-LA.

For 10 years, he has sermonized on the downfall of "the Los Angeleses, the New Yorks and the Detroits." He has devoted himself to telling people to move out of a city many weren't ready to leave.

But what with the crime, the crowds, the traffic — and of course the riots, fires, floods and earthquakes — Angelenos could be excused these days if they wondered whether Seavey didn't have a point.

Southern California, Seavey said in a press release he circulated after the Jan. 17 earthquake, is "the most dangerous urban area in the United States."

In the wake of the quake, Seavey shook into action. He dashed out 500 pieces of mail to San Fernando Valley residents, dropped off brochures at emergency shelters, wrote guest editorials for local newspapers.

Convincing people to leave urban areas is Seavey's mission, and helping them escape is his livelihood. And he's not the

only one; entrepreneurs like Tom Evons and Constance See are players in the bugout business.

Last year, when 900 people packed a room in La Jolla to hear Evons give his speech on "Escape San Diego," Evons knew what his next move would be. He expanded his operation to include "Escape L.A." and "Escape San Francisco."

See promotes leaving any risky place. She sells a map of the United States emblazoned with the question, "Are You Safe Where You Live?"; it is overlaid with statistics on rapes, murders, prison escapes, Superfund sites, breast cancer rates, earthquakes and other recipes for a short lifespan.

"I'll show you where the cancer, crud and crime are across the United States," says See, who runs City Seekers out of her home in Olympia, Wash.

After broadcast appearances in Los Angeles and San Francisco last fall, See was barraged with phone calls: 900 from Los Angeles and 700 from San Francisco.

About 15 percent of the callers went on to become clients. They paid See \$25 to compile information on particular cities and \$45 to be matched with their own

personal Eden somewhere in the country.

Some would say that idylls are getting harder to come by. When Matt Holbert left Galveston, Texas, for Boise, Idaho, he thought he was bidding adieu to urban clutter, gangs and graffiti.

Not so. Boise is beginning to grapple with some of the same "big city" plagues. Growth rates in Boise have been running at 6 percent for the past three years — 2 percent is about the norm.

"It if keeps growing at this pace," said Holbert, "we'll find a smaller city. But it's hard to get away from this growth."

At a recent rally to stop the building of a bridge across the Boise River, protesters sported T-shirts emblazoned with the word "Boiseangeles" enclosed in a circle with a red slash through it.

The same sentiment is widespread on the coast. About 65 percent of Allied Van Lines' 1993 California relocations were outbound, up from 58 percent in 1991. United Van Lines reported similar figures for 1993; in Los Angeles County, departees outnumbered arrivals by more than 2-to-1.

The subscription list for Seavey's quarterly newsletter has grown from 100 to

2,000 in three years, with the largest growth coming in Southern California.

"That's where the action is," says Seavey, a former resident of Los Angeles who now lives in Pahrump, Nev. (population: 10,000).

These days, he spends most of his time on the road, living out of his motorhome and extolling the virtues of small-town life at each stop.

He sells all kinds of relocation accessories: audio tapes and books on everything from setting up a home-based business to "Selling your Southern California Property When No One's Biting." He runs a "Meet, Match and Move" support group and oversees a network of "Hinterland Hosts," rural folks who serve as a welcome party to the newly relocated.

Seavey isn't sure how to react to others, like Evons and See, who have climbed on the get-out-of-L.A. bandwagon. On one hand, he says he's reluctant to give out any competitors' names, for fear of drawing attention to them. But then he adds:

"In some sense, the more the merrier. People need to know what the alternatives are to living in big, crowded, unsafe places.

"And that is our mission."

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Smokeless tobacco still risky

WASHINGTON (AP) — A 12-year study of 135,000 men found that users of smokeless tobacco are 1.4 times as likely to die of heart disease as those who don't use tobacco in any form.

Smokeless tobacco has been linked to heart disease, just as cigarettes have, but scientists didn't know just why. They suspect nicotine is the culprit.

So, in the longest-term study of the issue, researchers at Sweden's Karolinska Institute followed users of smokeless tobacco, which delivers higher doses of nicotine than cigarettes without the interference of smoke.

Their study, published in Tuesday's edition of the American Journal of Public Health, followed 135,000 construction workers from 1974 through 1985.

Of that number, 6,297 used smokeless tobacco, 14,983 smoked fewer than 15 cigarettes a day, 13,518 smoked more than 15 cigarettes a day and 32,546 had never used tobacco. The remainder had used tobacco in the past.

The researchers adjusted for weight, blood pressure and history of heart symptoms. Among all ages, smokeless-tobacco users were 1.4 times as likely to die of heart disease as people who never used tobacco. Light smokers were 1.8 times as likely to die, and heavy smokers 1.9 times.

But among men ages 35 to 54, the risk was 2.1 times as great for smokeless-tobacco users, 2.7 times for light smokers and 3.2 times for heavy smokers.

Drs. Gunilla Bolinder and Lars Alfredsson concluded that additional elements in cigarette smoke must be putting smokers at greater risk. But the risk to smokeless-tobacco users is enough to prompt closer looks at nicotine, they wrote.

