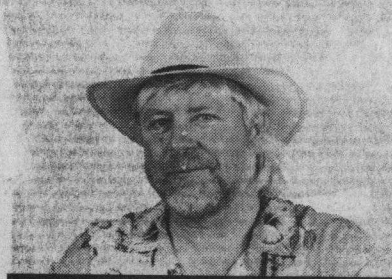


# Watsonville's new Gottschalks store fills shopping void

**I**F RAUL Rondariz's luck holds out, the parking lot behind the new Gottschalks store in Watsonville will be as full next week as it was Monday.

The 18-year-old "sales associate," whose last job was at the boardwalk over in Santa Cruz, was hoping Monday that opening-day crowds were a harbinger of things to come. If so, he said, there was a good chance that his part-time job could turn into a career.

Like nearly everyone else who showed up for opening-day festivities — which included snacks, clowns, face-painting and a pianist playing semi-classical music — Rondariz thinks the new de-



LEE QUARNSTROM

partment store is just what Watsonville needs. He also noted that the shoppers represented a real cross-section of the Pajaro Valley's population.

"There's a lot of variety," he said. "And it's not just Anglos

and Latinos. There are Filipinos, lots of Asians, everybody."

Rondariz just may have put his finger on something very significant. I've been shopping in Watsonville for a quarter-century and Monday's crowd at Gottschalks was the most ethnically and culturally diverse group I've seen anywhere in the Pajaro Valley except for the annual Santa Cruz County Fair.

Could it be that the engine of commerce as manifested by a department store will finally create the melting pot that has so long eluded people in the Pajaro Valley? I sure hope so.

Rondariz was only one of many employees and customers Mon-

## Shoplifters put on notice: you're on camera

While his fellow employees were busy serving new customers Monday, Gottschalks' security chief James Adams was busy watching them.

In town with a crew of security managers from other California Gottschalks stores, Adams said Monday he wants to make it very clear to potential shoplifters that they will be caught and prosecuted. And, he said, they will be sued to recover any losses that their actions might cause the Fresno-based merchandising chain.

Proudly displaying a camera system that "al-

lows us to see everything in the store except the fitting rooms and the restrooms," Gottschalks' corporate security director said no thieves had been arrested as of mid-day. But he and his staff had their ceiling-mounted cameras zeroed in on a woman they suspected was slipping garments into a bulging shopping bag.

"We can bust her or burn her," he said. "Today, opening day, maybe we'll just let her know we're on to her and tell her not to come back."

— Lee Quarnstrom

day who put their fingers on the other significant thing about this new store, which opened in the

fabulous building built by the Charles Ford Co. after the Loma Prieta earthquake.

"My parents and grandparents used to shop at Ford's," said Rondariz. See QUARNSTROM, Page 6B

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## Gottschalks fills shopping void

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dariz. "There's a big difference with this Gottschalks. This store is more modern and aimed more toward what Watsonville wants and needs.

"Here we are trying to serve the people."

Ford's, which took a fatal hit from the earthquake and made an embarrassing stab at resurgence after borrowing more than \$22 million from the federal government, lost touch with its customer base when it rebuilt. After putting up a Taj Mahal-like structure on Main Street, it proceeded to stock its shelves with items like an \$800 butcher block and lots of cute little gag gifts for golfers. It was as though the merchant princes who ran the store hadn't looked outside to see who lived in Watsonville nor what they were up to.

Gottschalks, the Fresno-based merchandiser that already operates three other emporiums in

Santa Cruz County, seems to have gotten it right in Watsonville. There is quality stuff; there is affordable stuff.

Compared to its huge facility at the Capitola Mall, the Watsonville store has a pared-down inventory. It doesn't carry furniture or electronics but it has a solid selection of men's, women's and children's clothing, cosmetics, bedding, kitchen equipment, china and glassware.

"The quality is comparable to Ford's," beamed lifelong Watsonville resident Terri Godwin. "But there's more of it. Oh, I'm so glad they're here."

"We've been shopping on 41st Avenue (in Capitola)" admitted her pal Elaine Gerzovich. "We're both really happy to see a good store like this here on Main Street."

Watsonville High School students Rita Garcia and Jacqueline Rivas, both 14, said they were glad they didn't have to go to duds.

"These are very nice clothes,"

said Garcia. "This is better than Ford's. The clothes are cheaper, more what people want."

"I'm a 'gift person,'" admitted shopper Joni Scurich. "I'm always buying gifts for this person or that. This is great. It's convenient to my job, so I can pop over during my lunch hour and pick up a present."

So you get it: Everybody is please with the convenience, the merchandise and the prices.

And many, such as real estate agent and agricultural advocate Bill Ringe, are enthused about the possibilities of having a big draw in downtown Watsonville.

"This, hopefully, is going to provide the heartbeat we've needed to get the economy back on the road to recovery," Ringe said as he browsed.

"It's like Ford's was in the old days, before the earthquake. It's back to being a place where you can buy a suit or you can buy work clothes. It's just what Watsonville needs."