

LOMA PRIETA EARTHQUAKE: 20 YEARS LATER

Somber Remembrance



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

A large crowd listens to Assemblyman Bill Monning at the steps of the Santa Cruz post office during a community commemoration of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake Saturday.

Thousands gather in Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Aptos

Earthquake - 10 years later

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Celebrating in style

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Are you ready?

A need for constant preparedness
the price we pay for living in paradise

SANTA CRUZ — A somber toll echoed down Pacific Avenue as the minute hand on the Town Clock reached 5:04 p.m. Saturday. The tolling of the bell marked the 20th anniversary of the 6.9 Loma Prieta earthquake.

More than 100 people bowed their heads at the post office steps on Front Street. Some wrapped loved ones in an embrace as they remembered the disaster that destroyed 29 buildings downtown, hundreds of homes and apartments in the city, and killed six people in the county.

The ceremony was just one of several throughout the county Saturday to remember the quake

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and celebrate the rebuilding.

"Downtown Santa Cruz has rebuilt with nearly 1 million square feet of new retail, office and residential space," Santa Cruz Mayor Cynthia Mathews told the crowd. "We should take this time to appreciate the amazing effort that has gone into rebuilding our downtown and city over the past 20 years, and commit to sustaining the remarkable sense of community."

City Manager Dick Wilson recalled the tireless efforts of then Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, and the work she did to repair the ravaged city.

"Her words were the city's words. She was strong and compassionate and made us proud

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she was our mayor," Wilson said. "We are very sorry that she can't be here today."

Wormhoudt is dealing with advanced melanoma and is in hospice care.

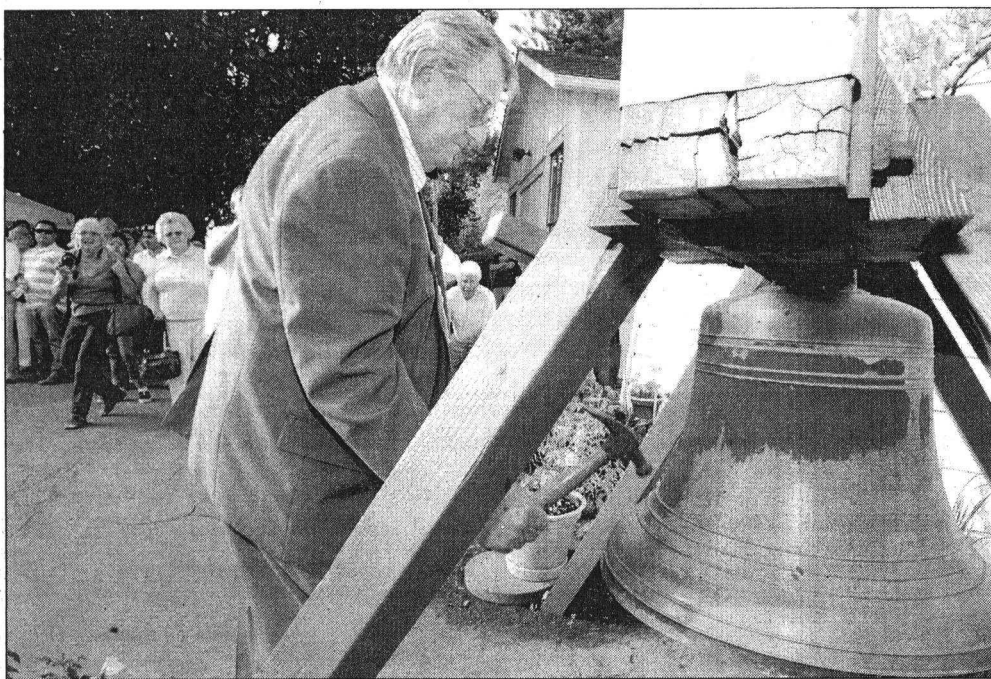
Larry Pearson, CEO of Pacific Cookie Co., spoke in her place. He discussed his role with Vision Santa Cruz, a 36-person task force designed to build consensus on the look of the new downtown.

"This moment in time affected a lot of people's lives," Pearson said. "It changed the way people lived and changed the way they thought about the community or it reinforced what they thought about the community. There are a lot of good things to remember."

Yvette Sanchez was living on North Branciforte Avenue when the quake hit. Sanchez said at Saturday's commemoration that her experiences were so traumatic she was unsure she wanted to participate.

"The fact of how fragile we are really, especially downtown, made it hard," she said. "But I saw a lot of people here that did come to remember and share their stories, the way we did after it happened. People needed to talk about it and still have stories to share."

Earlier in the day, families and emergency responders shared stories at Aptos Village Park during a disaster preparedness fair. Central and Aptos/La Selva Fire, Community Emergency Response Team,



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Wally Roberts, a 62-year member of the Watsonville I.O.O.F., strikes the bell, retrieved from the I.O.O.F. hall after the Loma Prieta earthquake, during a memorial Saturday in Watsonville.

Pacific Gas & Electric, the 911 dispatch center and others handed out information and showed how to put out fires and what to do when power lines break. A hydraulic "quake cottage" illustrated what an earthquake feels like.

"In most counties, people do a very good job of forgetting the past," said Jeffry Barnes of State Parks and a Community Emergency Response Team member. "In Watsonville and at the mall, there is nothing that says something terrible happened here 20 years ago. This event serves as a wake-up call, and to get people thinking again about the stuff they would need when disaster strikes."

Dolly Barnes said the free training with the response team taught her valuable skills and brought her neigh-

borhood together.

"It's good to get to know your neighbors so you can be prepared to respond in any situation," Barnes said. "This training empowers people so they feel they can lead in the community. If you're willing to step up and be a leader, you can really get things done."

Carey Webber of Soquel brought his family so his young children could learn about disaster preparedness.

"I was 11 when the earthquake happened," Webber recalled. "What I remember most is the way people came together after it ended. I definitely think it's important to teach kids while they're young that things can happen, and that it might be scary, but if you are prepared it will be less stressful and you can feel in control."

In Watsonville, the Pajaro

Valley Historical Association invited the public to the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts. Staff there hosted tours of the museum's photographs and newspaper accounts that captured the quake. At 5:04 p.m., the I.O.O.F. clock bell was rung for the first time since the day of the earthquake.

"It was a very emotional time for those of us who were there," said Jane Borg, volunteer with the association.

An Odd Fellows official struck the bell seven times in honor of the six deaths in Santa Cruz County and the one county resident who died in San Francisco.

"It was a nice way to remember how well everyone worked together and came through enormous challenges, tremendous injuries, loss of life and loss of property," Borg said.