

✓ Quake rescue hero prefers his anonymity

EARTHQUAKE '89 - City
of Santa Cruz



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Rescuers dig through debris at Ford's just after the earthquake.

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SANTA CRUZ — A humble hero who embarked on a 10-hour rescue mission immediately after the Oct. 17 earthquake wants to "remain anonymous to honor all those who did so much and will never be acknowledged."

"I would like to salute all those who put others first," he said.

The man, a 42-year-old resident of Rio Del Mar, was in the Cooper House when the 7.1 temblor hit at 5:04 p.m.

His heroism was captured in a Sentinel photograph published the day after the quake showing him and two unidentified men carrying a seriously injured Edith Dominguez, 68, from the ruins of Ford's department store on the mall.

Dominguez was just one of several quake victims helped by the man, a medical school graduate who works in the emergency room of a Santa Clara Valley hospital.

His night of valor began innocently enough, with a 5 o'clock stop at the Cooper House sushi stand.

"I was picking up some sushi for an 18-year-old boy who had just broken up with his girlfriend. We were going to have lunch together. At the moment it happened I threw my sushi on the floor and grabbed a lady next to me and put my arms over her head as everything crumbled around us. ...



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Edith Dominguez was rescued.

"I could slowly see the ceiling crashing down on us."

"I had to pull this lady out by her hair because she started getting hysterical," he said. "I started running up and down the street trying to give people some direction — nobody knew what to do."

"The dust from the mortar and plaster was so thick in the air that you could hardly see anything."

"I started yelling 'Is anybody hurt?'"

"As I was running up and down the street I heard this lady screaming and crying down by Ford's. There was a lady

(Edith Dominguez) trapped in almost 5 feet of rubble.

"There was a terrible gas leak there, a terrible gas leak going on. Myself and several other people dug her out. It took about 12 minutes to get her out, but it seemed like forever," he said.

"I just got her out and kept her in the C-spine position, because she said her neck hurt."

"We got her out to the street and into a (Santa Cruz Police) squad car. I wondered, 'How many kids are on the street?' but there was someone right there that we could help."

"I told her 'Thank God, you made it' and sent her on her way. She seemed reassured a little bit."

Dominguez was reported to be in serious condition, but improving slowly at Community Hospital Thursday.

His mission didn't stop at Ford's.

"Then I went down the street trying to find more injured people. They found the girl (Brittany) Manriquez at the Coffee Roasting Co. They had gotten her out of the building and she was lying on the street when I got there. I evaluated her and put her on a (back)board and put her in the ambulance. She said somebody else was up there. There was so much confusion," he said.

Manriquez's boyfriend, 21-year-old Shawn McCormick, was later found

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Hero/ Pulled victims from mall debris

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crushed to death. The body of Robin Lynn Ortiz, 22, was recovered from the coffee shop two days later.

After helping Manriquez into an ambulance, "I went to Community Hospital and did volunteer work, helping to set casts."

"I didn't go to my house until much later that night — around 3 a.m. — and my house was quite wiped out."

The man does not think of himself as a hero.

"Even the biggest heroes are the most scared. The thought of fear was always around but I didn't want to entertain it. I wanted action. I wanted results."

Moments of eerie tranquility punctuated those results.

"As everything crumbled around us at the Cooper House, there was a big wave of peace. It was almost beautiful. I felt real peaceful.

"When everything was shaking it was almost peaceful at that moment. I looked up during the quake and written on the Cooper House archway were the words 'Forever Joy.' It must have been written 100 years ago — everything else was covered except that."

Before the quake, he had parked his prized BMW on Pacific Avenue. Other autos nearby were totaled by falling debris. His car had nary a scratch.

"When I came back later to get my car someone had written 'Your lucky day' on the back in the dust."



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Rescuer's car was between two others crushed by quake debris.

Building gets reprieve

SANTA CRUZ — The owner and tenants of a damaged downtown building received a stay of execution Thursday so they can bring in their own engineer for an inspection.

Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Tom Black halted demolition until an emergency hearing scheduled for Saturday. The Hihn Building, one side of which fell exposing the interior of one office, is on the city's condemned list.

Tenants of the building at Lincoln Street and Pacific Avenue want a chance to remove files and

business records before the building is demolished. City officials have refused to allow anyone in. One tenant was arrested Wednesday when he vaulted a chainlink fence and spent an hour inside gathering his stuff.

Owner Gloria Welsh presented a declaration from Noel Patterson, the building's manager since 1925, outlining major structural improvements made in the past 10 to 15 years.

The City Attorney's office agreed to the delay as long as no one was allowed inside until the hearing.