

Opinion

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

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Disaster brings us all together

WHEN A DISASTER STRIKES, it tests the mettle of a community. Looking at the aftermath of Tuesday's earthquake from that standpoint, the people of Watsonville and Santa Cruz County came through.

Miraculously, this area escaped without the large number of fatalities that you'd expect from an earthquake of this magnitude, and many, in fact, did die in the San Francisco Bay area. Even so, there was the tragedy here of those who were killed and those who lost their homes, full of priceless memories, in the fires that broke out in the hours following the earthquake.

The work of police officers, firefighters and medical personnel under impossible circumstances was nothing less than heroic. Under ordinary circumstances we tend not to think about how good these people are, but at a time like this they prove it, and the entire community truly appreciates it.

Also deserving of the highest praise is the hard work and dedication of PG&E crews and workers from the various water departments. They have been working almost continuously to restore necessary services. The restoration of power to much of the county well ahead of the time anyone thought it could be done is a testament to their competence and commitment.

We may never know how many ordinary citizens came forward to help in emergencies, but it was certainly quite a few. In the hours immediately following the earthquake, Watsonville City Hall received many inquiries from people who wanted to help.

In fact, people on the whole handled the earthquake pretty well. Tuesday night, a lot of people were out on the streets. It's as if they had to talk about the experience among themselves in order to reaffirm it. But despite the blackouts, there was virtually no looting.

On the beautiful Indian Summer day that followed, the mood was almost giddy in many places. People congregated in vacant lots and had impromptu barbecues. In the city parks and shelters the mood seemed to be almost that of people on a camping trip.

As gas stations and stores began to open Wednesday afternoon, the employees were often excited and gregarious. They realized anew, if they hadn't before, that they really were providing essential services. It was a small reminder of the point that the earthquake reinforced for all of us. We need each other.