

# No 'occupant' here

Earthquake - SLV/Summit



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The postman no longer calls in the Woodland Heights neighborhood, which was forcibly vacated after the Love Creek slide.

## Slide victims feel quake victims' pain

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BEN LOMOND — Woodland Heights is a quiet neighborhood. No cars disturb the drifts of autumn-colored leaves on the asphalt, no people can be seen in the darkened homes. Runners of ivy reach across the roadway, undisturbed. No children play in the yards, no dogs bark.

Nobody lives here anymore.

### ■ Trailers may be loaned to some mountain residents — Page A6

Twenty-eight families in this hillside neighborhood were ordered to abandon their homes after the Love Creek landslide of 1982 churned nine neighboring homes into splinters and killed 10 people. Geologists discovered a four-foot slip in the hillside

above the Woodland homes, indicating the possibility of another landslide. Fearing another deadly tragedy, the county moved to "abate" the area, declaring the homes unsafe for habitation.

For some Love Creek-area homeowners, the Oct. 17 earthquake has reawakened the painful emotions of nearly eight years ago.

Please see PAIN — A22



# Family/Slide victims say county's comfort cold

Continued from Page A1

Geologists have found cracks lacing the earth in several mountain neighborhoods, mostly in the Summit area. The cracks may indicate the reactivation of ancient landslides. If studies show that these areas are moving, more than 100 families could face forced evacuation.

"My heart goes out to those people in the Summit who could have their homes abated," said Theresa Watson, a former Woodland Drive resident. "The procedure of abatement is incredible - it's impossible to really fathom that you're going to lose

your house.

"You get absolutely nothing, and then to add insult to injury, you're faced with the cost of demolishing your own home," she said.

Watson's former neighbor Jerry Delaney agreed.

"The slide was not the worst part of it for those of us who lived," he said. "It was trying to deal with the government. It was indescribably frustrating - we felt a mental fatigue and duress that I couldn't have dreamed would occur in the beginning. I actually broke a couple of teeth from tension, my jaw was so tight."

The county's abatement order was immediately challenged in court, and lawsuits against the county, the City of Santa Cruz, several insurance companies and a business known as Valley Ventures were filed by the evicted families.

The lawsuits dragged on for years, but most were finally settled out of court by late 1987 for a total of \$3.5 million.

Most former Woodland Heights residents have managed to get on with their lives, but the incident has left permanent scars. Delaney still feels angry about how he was treated by the county.

"My wife and I had gone to town to buy bread and milk, about a two mile walk," Delaney said. "On the way home a sheriff stopped us and said, 'You can't go in there, the area's closed.' We told him our son was in the house alone."

"The deputy asked us how old our son was," Delaney said. "He was 17 or 18 at the time, and when we told the deputy that he said 'He's old enough to figure it out'. He snuck around through backyard and bushes to get to my son, and was scared to death. And talk about angry, I'm still angry."

The Delaneys moved in with friends, then rented a shared house with another family. Eventually they dismantled their home and used the material to build a new house in Santa Cruz. But the incident nearly wiped them out financially.

And because his family received federal disaster aid, they were later audited by the Internal Revenue Service.

"It's a peculiar situation," Delaney said. "If you're dealing with *laissez faire* capitalism then the property owner is left to do what he feels is best. If your land is worthless, that's tough. And if you want to live there and die, that's tough too."

"But when the government is more socialist, and comes in and tells you, 'You should leave for your own protection, in fact you *must* leave,' then they should compensate you," he said.

Neither Delaney nor Watson are convinced their neighborhood is as unsafe as the geologists thought it was in 1982.

"It's all still standing," Watson said. "Those places will be there for the next hundred years, they'll outlive us. They've certainly gone through torrential rains and a few major earthquakes. I don't know how much study they're doing up in the Summit, but they abated our homes with only a flimsy, five-page study from the Army Corps of Engineers."

But county officials are convinced the area is still dangerously unstable.

"It hasn't come down yet, but it will someday," county Supervisor Gary Patton said last week. "And when it does, it's not going to kill anybody."

Watson and her husband Chas bought another home in Boulder Creek, and Watson says she wouldn't move back to Woodland Drive if she could.

"My life has gone on," she said. "But I still haven't recovered (emotionally). When there were those fires in Lexington I freaked out and when it rains I'm anxious. I still have a lot of anxiety attacks."

"At least with us it was quick," she said. "We had to leave quickly, we made the decisions quickly. We bought a new house within five months. We started a new life immediately. But the people on the Summit, their lives are put on hold for maybe two years."