

# Around the Valley

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## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

# Earthquake danger suddenly shutter Vets Hall

Veterans

The future of a popular community hub was thrown into question Thursday when county officials cited the Veterans Memorial Building as seismically unsound and ordered everyone out by the end of the day.

Reports of stucco falling from the building's facade evolved into an engineer's evaluation that concluded the facility's concrete and steel shell was "deteriorating" and the property was not safe to occupy. County officials took no chances, closing the Vets Hall at 5 p.m. and canceling all events there indefinitely.

"This is really uprooting a lot of people," said the building's manager, Tim Bratton, who was sent packing on only a few hours' notice.

The iconic downtown center, opened in 1932 as a tribute to those who served in World War I and registered as a historical landmark today, not only houses the county's Veteran's Service Office but also provides a venue for a variety of local events.

Fliers hung from the building's bulletin boards Thursday, advertising reggae shows, drum circles and yoga workshops, none of which will proceed, at least at this location.

"There's a lot of us who had regular classes," said yoga instructor Jayla Klein, of Santa Cruz, who has been teaching at the center for five years. "It's really unique what the Vets Hall has been able to offer. It won't be easy to change venues. It's very sad."

County officials don't know when, or if, the building will reopen. A more thorough evaluation of the nearly 80-year-old facility is expected to begin next week and last several weeks, if not months.

"I am hopeful that we can find options that the building can be repaired and put back



ROBINSON KUNTZ

The Santa Cruz County Veterans Memorial Building on Front Street opened in 1932.

in service," said Nancy Gordon, director of county's General Services Department, which oversees county facilities.

The Vets Hall, at 846 Front St., is run by a nonprofit, but the property is county-owned. The preliminary engineering report, prepared this week by Streeter Group, said the building's concrete columns were cracking and the reinforced steel was rusting within. The report cited "a significant risk of injury or death to

the occupants of the auditorium" in the event of an earthquake.

County officials said the building, like other county facilities, is regularly inspected for safety, and, according to the Vets Hall's Web site, had major ceiling work in 2007. However, the latest problem was not noticed until it was reported by the facility manager last week.

— Kurtis Alexander,  
Santa Cruz Sentinel