

Felton town center to open

Six years since hall burned down

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Members of the Felton Community Club have an extra reason to be thankful this year. On Friday, more than six years after the original Felton Community Hall burned to the ground, the group will celebrate the partial reopening of a new 56,000-square-foot town center.

A Baby Grand Opening will be held the day after Thanksgiving inside the nearly completed Felton Community Hall at the corner of Highway 9 and Kirby Street in downtown Felton.

Although the kitchen and 285-seat auditorium still need to be finished and furnished, the rest of the building, including a 65-person-capacity meeting room, has been open and available for rent since mid-October. Representatives from the non-profit club have invited the public to tour the new building constructed on the site of the original Felton Community Hall and join them in a champagne and soda pop celebration.

The festivities will include a ceremony honoring four yet-to-be-announced individuals who were instrumental in the rebuilding project. Following the awards presentation, Jeff Almquist, who is replacing Fred Keeley on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, will be sworn into office. At the conclusion of the open house, the Felton Business Association will hold its annual holiday tree lighting ceremony in front of the building.

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Felton's town center to open with party

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"We're really happy with the way it looks, but we're sad that it's not totally finished," said Carol Miller, treasurer of the Felton Community Club. "The Baby Grand Opening will show people what we have left to do."

The club needs to raise an estimated \$120,000 to install hardwood floors in the auditorium, insulate and add sheet rock to the room, complete the stage, and furnish the kitchen, said Jim Bricken, president of the Felton Community Club. He estimates the total cost of the new hall at about \$700,000.

Funds still needed

Insurance on the original building, which burned to the ground in August 1990, brought in \$292,000. Santa Cruz County paid \$100,000 for the right to use the new building as a disaster relief center over the next 30 years. Club members, who sold key chains, T-shirts and historical dolls, staffed booths at local fairs and events and solicited materials, cash and in-kind donations over the past six years, will continue raising funds until the building is finished.

Historical similarity

The original town hall was built in 1925 and was well used by San Lorenzo Valley residents. Inexpensive to rent, the building was used for thousands of town dances, weddings, meetings, forums, pageants and fundraisers. Bricken notes the original community building was also opened to the public before it was completed.

"They needed \$1,200 to \$1,400 more to finish it," Bricken said. "They raised enough money at the grand opening to finish the hall."

Obviously hoping history will repeat itself, Bricken said club members will encourage people to make donations at the Baby Grand Opening.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Baby Grand Opening of the Felton Community Hall, on the corner of Highway 9 and Kirby Street in downtown Felton, will be held Nov. 29 from 2 to 5 p.m. For more information on the hall, call (408) 335-5621.