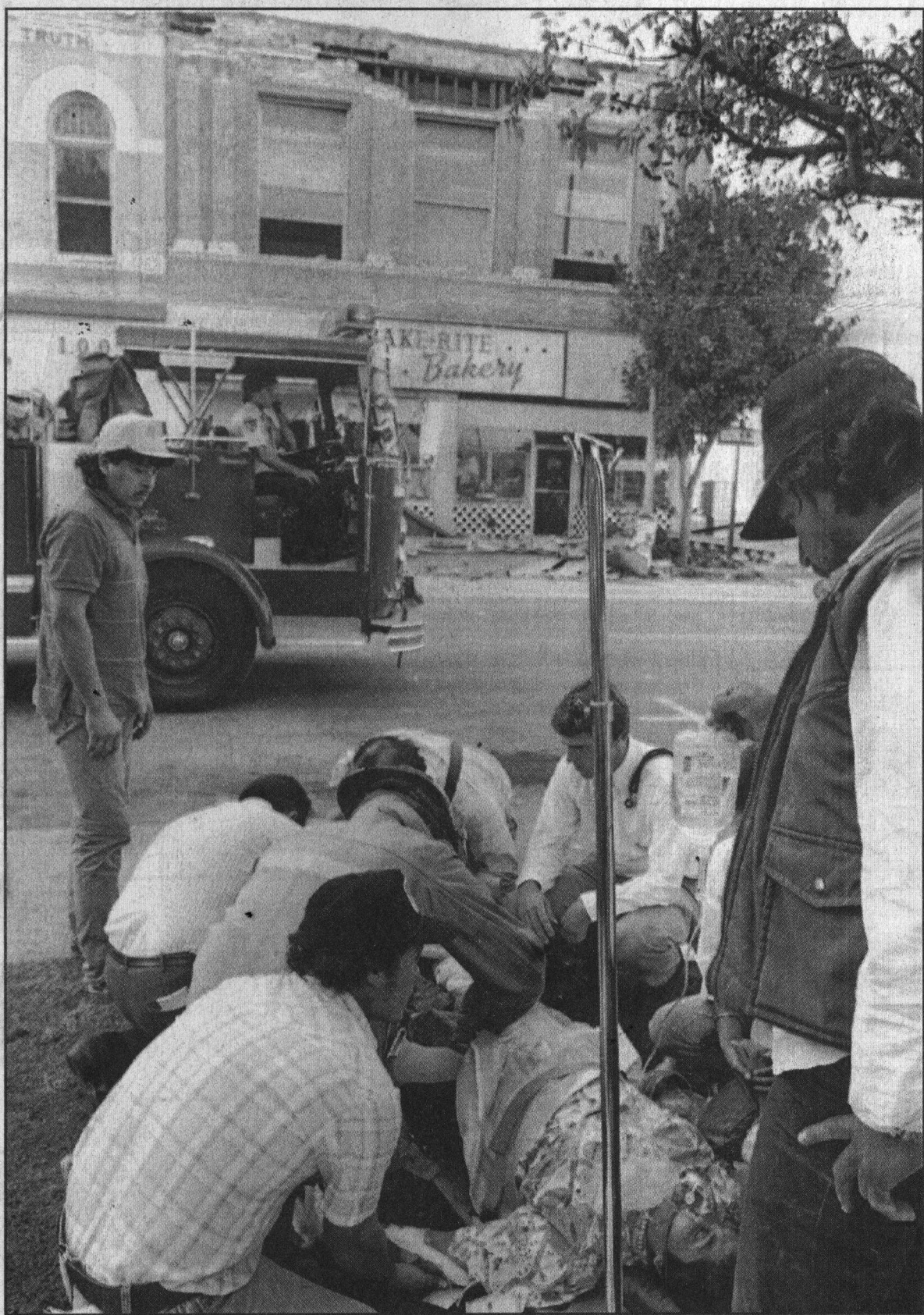


Aftershock



Register-Pajaronian file

Emergency workers treat a woman who was injured by falling building materials at Bake-Rite Bakery on East Beach Street at Main Street moments after the Oct. 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquake.

Earthquake - Ten years later

10.16.04

15 years after the Loma Prieta earthquake rocked Watsonville, much has changed

By LAURA NORTON
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The before and after photos spread out across longtime Watsonville resident Lloyd Smith's dining room table show a city thrown off balance, rocked by rolling waves of earth that left a path of destruction that Smith said Wat-

sonville has never recovered from.

"There's still a void," he said, pulling out a particularly gray photo of Main Street's 200 block. "The worst thing has been getting back up on our feet. It was a real struggle."

The Loma Prieta earthquake that turned parts of Watsonville,

Santa Cruz and the Bay Area to rubble is today little more than photos, memories and the occasional empty lot where a once-prosperous business stood.

For students at Watsonville High School, a building decimated

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QUAKE

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by the magnitude-7.1 earthquake, students now know about the destruction from their history books and geology lessons, not personal experience.

It is an important reminder that — 15 years after the Oct. 17, 1989, rumblings, when the earth rolled and time stood still — life goes on.

It is uncertain how much Watsonville would have changed without the earthquake, Smith said, noting patterns of displaced economic centers in small towns across the country. But the quake and the subsequent devastation of downtown, he said, may have contributed to the decline of Watsonville's central business district.

"It's been difficult for the businesses," said Smith, who was born in Watsonville and ran a longstanding family dental practice in town. "They're still not doing the business they would like to do — the business they were doing before. It just didn't return. They weren't able to bring it back together. Watsonville has never really returned to what it was."

For some businesses, the quake meant devastation; Ford's Department Store and Family Bargain Center went out of business. For others it meant relocation.

For some businesses, it meant a chance. Gottschalks moved in, as did the small shops in Plaza Vigil and El Aleno restaurant.

Watsonville Mayor Judy Doering-Nielsen said the change was dramatic and has taken some getting used to.

"It's a totally different economy now," she said. It took so much away from the city. What Watsonville is today is very different from what it was before the earthquake. How do you make up for the loss of these buildings and businesses?"

Still, the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce estimated soon after the quake that nearly 500 businesses — or 25 percent of the economy — were forced to close, at least temporarily.

"It was just such a sense of helplessness," Doering-Nielsen said.

But she noted that the downtown area is currently on an upturn.

"It has taken years to try and bring (the downtown economy) back," she said. "Economic recovery is coming back though. The 200



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This Watsonville home was shifted entirely off its foundation by the 1989 quake.

Still, for many people who lived through the quake, the question remains: If a similar quake were to occur, is Santa Cruz County ready?

block is a huge step."

Other signs of recovery can be found all around town.

St. Patrick's Catholic Church, after being condemned and then bulldozed to the ground, has been rebuilt. The steeple and stained glass windows were saved, and the outer structure of the church was recreated, reviving a landmark.

It was a project that took six years, more than \$4 million and the fund-raising efforts of entertainer Bill Graham, church volunteer Kathy Begley said.

"After the church was condemned, we said mass at the parish hall on Brennan Street until May 1994. But we saved the beams, the lights and the stained glass," Begley said.

Still, for many people who lived through the quake, the question remains: If a similar quake were to occur, is Santa Cruz County ready?

Aptos/La Selva Fire Chief Tom

Crosser says "yes," particularly after a \$425,000 seismic retrofitting project at Fire Station 3, and plans for similar projects at stations 1 and 2.

"There's no guarantee that there would be no damage, but it would be safe under the most likely strength (of quake)," Crosser said, adding that he would rather be at Station 3 than his home if a quake were to hit.

"Houses are not built to public safety building standards. This building should withstand the most likely strength of earthquake," he said.

Seismic retrofitting projects at stations 1 and 2 are expected to be completed within the next two fiscal years and will cost an estimated \$475,000.

Most of the retrofitting has included bracing walls and reconfiguring how floors are connected to the walls.

At Station 3, a fire truck bay door was removed and replaced with sheer walling and a window was closed up on the second story. Crosser said these changes provided more structural support.

"It's the safest station we have," he said.

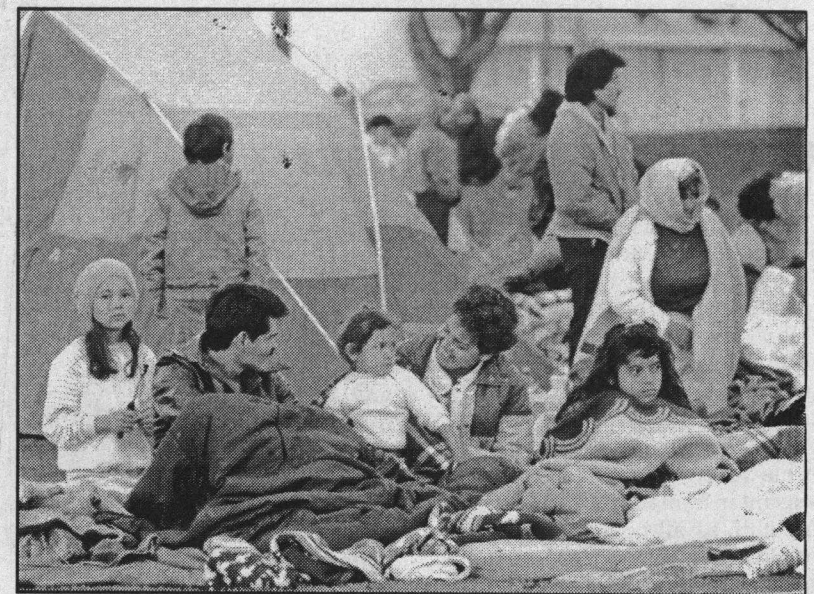
Also, Homeland Security funds have allowed the district to buy equipment such as flexible-necked cameras and heat sensors useful in earthquake, as well as terrorist, emergencies.

Doering-Nielsen said she thought the city of Watsonville is very well prepared for the possibility of another large earthquake.

"Police and fire are very well trained and prepared. The city staff is prepared should any emergency happen," she said.

Still, she said she didn't think the city needed to hold its breath.

"But by the way I look at it, before the '89 quake there was the



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Many Watsonville residents were relegated to area parks to live temporarily in tents after their homes were deemed unsafe due to quake damage.



Courtesy of Lloyd Smith

Watsonville High School was torn down due to major structural damage in the quake.

1906 quake. 1906, 1989; I figure we have a lot of time. I would feel less comfortable living in Florida with hurricanes," she said.

University of California, Santa Cruz geology professor Gary Griggs said the anniversary has taken on a particular significance this year. With fellow geologist David Schwartz and historian Sandy Lydon, Griggs plans to hike up to the quake's epicenter in The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

"It's always good to think back about those visual pictures, the Cooper House, the mall, downtown Watsonville, the houses that collapsed," Griggs said. "We have a

short disaster memory."

Still, like many Watsonville residents, he said the anniversary is one that brings back a lot of memories, adding that he found it hard to believe that so much time has passed.

"It's going to be hard to see (the epicenter) because it was so dramatic afterward," he said. "But plants grow back and the earth heals. The earth is really forgiving. It won't look as dramatic now as it did 15 years ago."

For Smith, with his earthquake photos spread chronologically across the table, this is the most telling aftershock of all: Loma Prieta is history.