

The Quake of '89

QUAKE INDEX

INSIDE THIS SECTION

- Where and how to get help.....18A
- Media attention doesn't ease the road ahead in Santa Cruz.....21A
- High winds stop recovery work at viaduct.....22A
- Mapping the Bay Area's faults.....24A

LOCAL

- Threatening weather or no, food airlift takes off.....1B
- Quake exacted a heavy toll from Stanford.....1B
- The wait for federal help grows frustrating in Los Gatos.....2B

LIVING

- Quake creates the new homeless.....1C
- Bruce Stephan thought he was a dead man.....1C

HOME

- A look at potential effects of the quake on real estate values.....1D
- How to inspect your house for damage.....1D
- A homeowner's practical guide to putting the pieces together.....2D
- How to make your house safer before the next earthquake.....3D

SPORTS

- Quake shelters have some celebrated drop-in visitors.1E
- Niners try to focus on football.....1E

BUSINESS

- Insurers seem to be settling homeowner claims

‘Mountain people who live up here are pretty much used to being the last in line.’

—Tom Hamel, resident of Laurel

Awaiting help in seclusion

By Paul Rogers
Mercury News Staff Writer

For two days, Beverly Sollars listened to her portable radio in agonizing frustration, trapped in a decimated Santa Cruz Mountains community so remote that rescue crews didn't even know she and her neighbors existed.

"The radio kept telling everyone where to go to get food and water," she said. "I was crying, listening to it for the 50th time and knowing I couldn't get there."

Finally, help came Thursday, when Sollars' worried mother contacted the Salvation Army. When county workers cleared rocks and trees from the fractured one-lane roads leading to the tiny community of Laurel, they found three-quarters of its 50 houses uninhabitable — collapsed, broken, some lying literally on their sides.

Then, Thursday night, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. workers turned on electricity without having trekked in to check power lines. Sparks shot from downed wires, setting off a four-acre blaze that kept fire crews busy until early morning.

Sollars, who has lived nearly 20 years in the wooded knot of houses two miles

from Highway 17's summit, has survived blizzards, forest fires and landslides with her neighbors. And now, like most of them, she has chosen to stay in her home, just a mile or two from the San Andreas Fault.

"Mountain people who live up here are pretty much used to being the last in line," said Tom Hamel, surveying the broken deck on his house and the clearly visible foundation three feet off center. "You expect it that way. If they tell us a week for something, you know it'll be two."

Proportionally, it is likely no region in the Bay Area suffered the devastation that residents in the Laurel area have endured. Because the community sits hidden under a canopy of redwoods in precipitous terrain that allows only four-wheel-drive vehicles access, relief has been virtually non-existent.

A four-man Salvation Army crew carrying food and fresh water arrived Thursday after the boulders and fallen trees were cleared from the access roads. Workers brought seven generators, some bottled water and food.

"There was no one. No relief agencies, no power companies — no one came up

here," said Salvation Army Lt. Kenneth Hodder. "It was largely because the roads were blocked."

Phone service is sporadic now. Power is still out. Half the buildings are condemned, waiting to be bulldozed.

Residents whose homes are standing serve meals and let their displaced neighbors sleep in guest rooms or on floors. People draw buckets of water from the creeks to wash dishes; they fill their toilets with the silty mixture when they have to go to the bathroom.

Contractors have told Hamel it will be three weeks before they can even take a look at his wrecked house. He was in Candlestick Park during the quake.

"I heard the epicenter was 10 miles northeast of Santa Cruz; we live seven miles northeast of Santa Cruz," he said. "I finally got up here at 2 a.m., took one look and turned around and left."

Other residents, like Michelle Olin, were driving toward the Highway 17 summit when the quake hit. Olin dodged falling boulders, drove as close to Laurel Road as she could and hiked 3½ miles through darkened forest in high heels to get to Laurel.

The biggest inconvenience now is the

task of reconnecting the area's water supply. Two of Laurel's four holding tanks are destroyed, and because water service is a community-run operation instead of a municipal utility's problem, no one is sure when running water will return.

"We have to fix the pipes ourselves. It's all our men who work over the hill who have to do the work," Sollars said. "We can't afford to hire anybody. It'll take at least a month."

But inconveniences come with the territory. Most families have propane stoves, stacks of flashlight batteries and tents.

A hundred years ago, Laurel supported a small-time lumber industry. Today, it acts as a tranquil hideaway for people willing to swap periodic natural calamities for spectacular views and the peace of mind that comes with living amid silent groves of 200-foot redwoods.

"We're really in no man's land. No one claims us," Sollars said, relaxing from a cleanup job that had family members using shovels in the kitchen.

Moments later a smile came to her face. "But where can you get this beauty?"

