

Ford's executive reiterates commitment to the downtown

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

When Hal Hyde of Ford's Department Store steps out of his temporary office, there's a reminder of the company's past — and future — just a few feet away.

The reminder is the empty lot at Main and West Beach streets, where Ford's, the largest business in downtown Watsonville, had stood for more than 100 years.

But on Oct. 17, the 7.1 earth-

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quake that hit Northern California caused irreparable damage to the store, and it was demolished. The store found temporary quarters on South Green Valley Road and is now operating in the old Dick Bruhn building at Rodriguez and West Beach Streets, in a third of the space of the old Ford's.

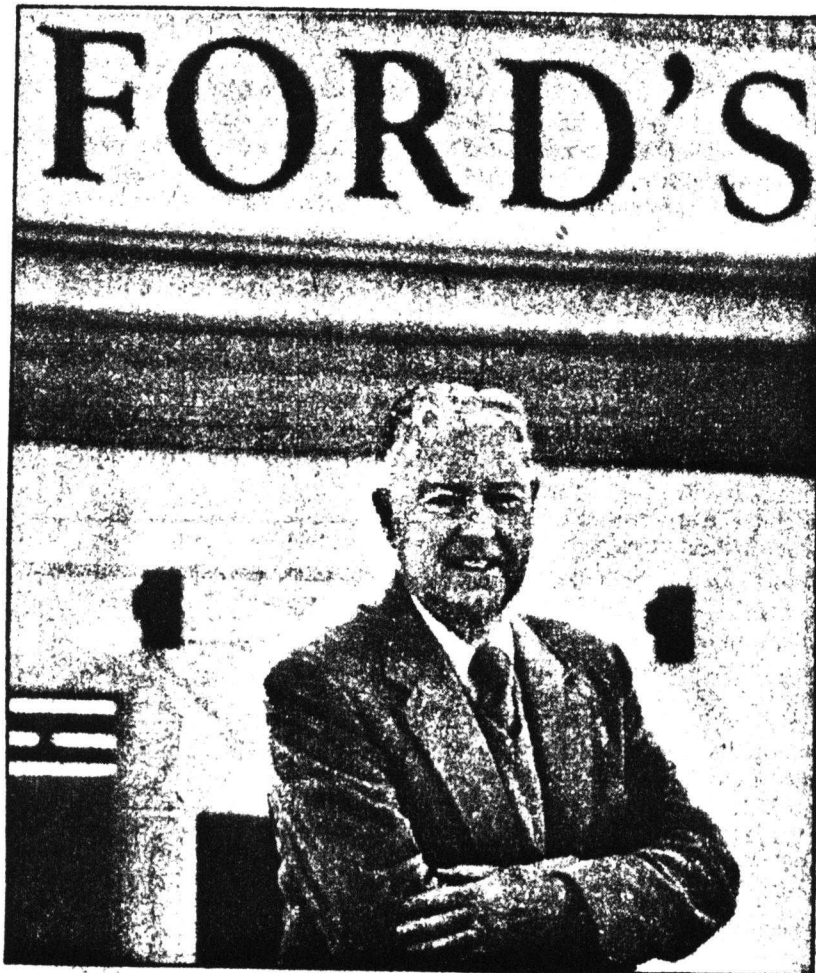
Despite the damage, Hyde said, he was optimistic about the company's future in Watsonville during an interview earlier this week.

Hyde, the store's senior vice president, isn't whistling in the dark — he acknowledges that rebuilding will take time and that there are a number of issues to be resolved. But he reiterated what he's been saying since shortly after the earthquake — that Ford's plans to rebuild on its downtown property.

The key issue, Hyde said, is financing. He doesn't foresee a problem in getting financing, but he said "there are all kinds of questions."

"It's a really complicated situation," Hyde said.

It will be three to five years



Kurt Ellison

Hal Hyde said sales at the store's temporary location downtown were picking up.

before Ford's rebuilds, Hyde predicted.

"I'd say three years would be miraculous," he said.

Ford's has a three-year lease on the Bruhn building.

Ford's wants to see other businesses rebuild as well, Hyde said, but the company's plans are not dependent on what anybody else does.

In the past, Hyde had expressed concern that the eco-

nomic health of the downtown as a whole was slipping, although Ford's was able to hold its share of the market. Now, he said, there's an opportunity to improve the downtown as new buildings replace those destroyed by the earthquake.

Some problems, such as traffic patterns and parking, will be easier to solve with the buildings gone, he said.

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Hyde said there should be "some kind of common vision" for the downtown, but the buildings that go up "don't have to be

peas in a pod."

The new store, Hyde said, will be two stories and between 70,000 and 80,000 square feet.

At the store in the Bruhn building, which opened last month, Hyde said, "we're starting to get some good sales."

The earthquake also destroyed Ford's stores in Hollister and Santa Cruz. In Hollister, a new site has been found that's larger than the old one, and the company is looking for a spot to rebuild in Santa Cruz, Hyde said.

REFERENCE

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