

'Eternal' light floods Town Clock

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SANTA CRUZ — "It's pretty."

So stated 3-year-old Gretchen May as she watched a host of dignitaries throw the switch to permanently light the Town Clock during ceremonies Saturday. Several hundred white lights now decorate the top portion of the clock, and will act as a symbol of the "new eternal spirit of Santa Cruz," according to Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt.

Around 500 people gathered in rapidly cooling weather for the lighting, which culminated a day of holiday activities that included a downtown parade and community Christmas carol sing-along.

The parade featured everyone from Esther Abbott, wife of the late Chuck Abbott, known as the founder of the Pacific Garden Mall, to Santa Cruz High's Big Red Band, whose members traded in traditional band hats for Christmas stockings.

The procession wound through a portion of the damaged mall, past gaping holes where Ford's department store once stood, and then past the Phoenix pavilions, where dozens of dislodged mall businesses are now operating.

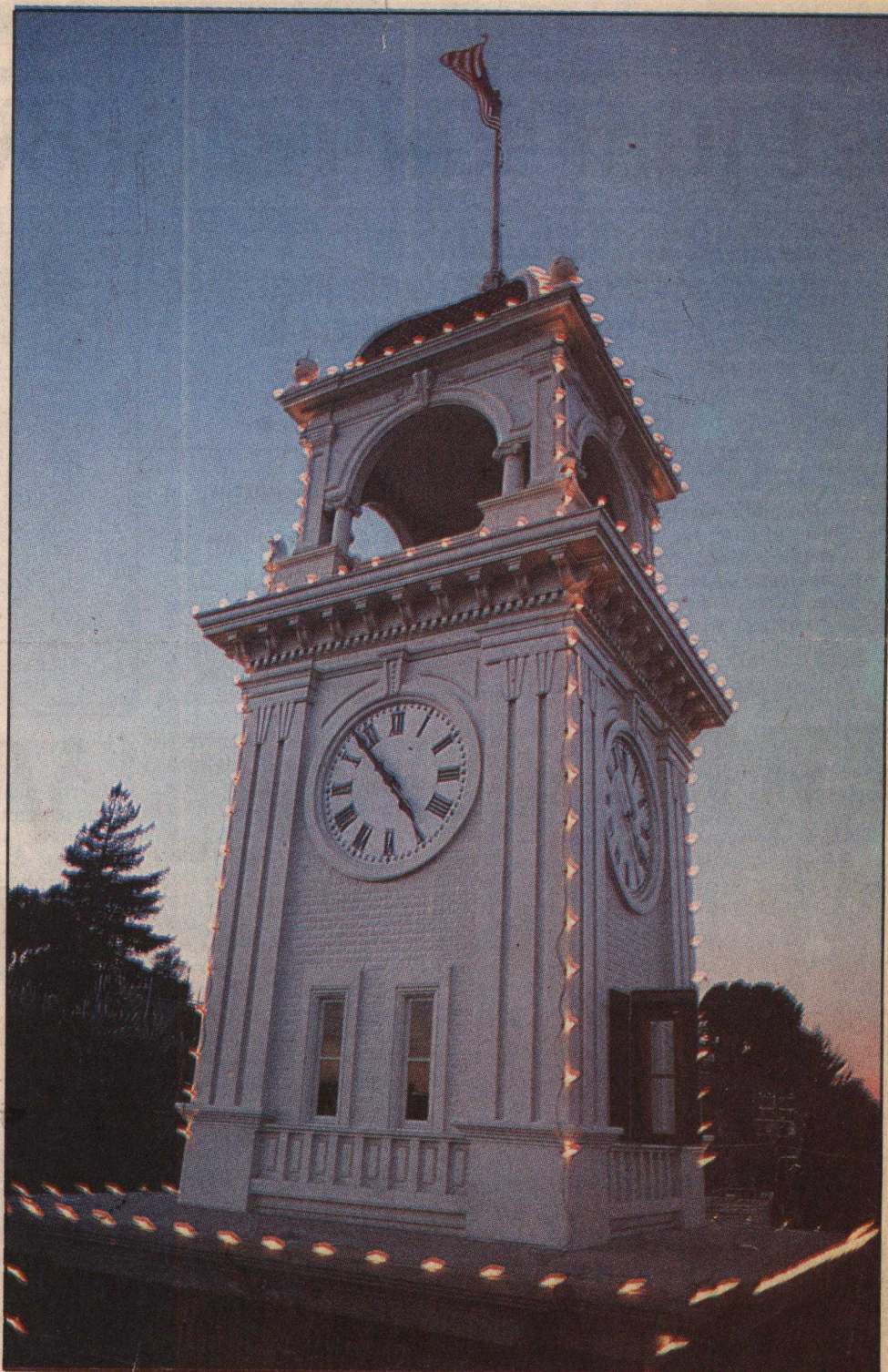
During the lighting ceremony, Wormhoudt maintained, "We've lost a lot in terms of downtown landmarks like the Cooperhouse. But the Town Clock can be a symbol of downtown. The lighting represents a new birth."

Wormhoudt noted that the lighting had been planned even before the Oct. 17 earthquake in order to celebrate the Pacific Garden Mall's 20th anniversary. The Town Clock will remain lit after dark even after the holidays.

U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey, lauded Santa Cruz residents' "will to survive." Paraphrasing Winston Churchill, Panetta said, "We shall fight the floods. We shall fight the landslides. We shall fight earthquakes. We shall never surrender."

Louie Rittenhouse, president of the Downtown Association, added, "It's so wonderful to be doing something somewhat normal again."

The lights and installation of the lights were provided by PG&E. Ron Rhodes, general manager of the coast division of PG&E and president of the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council, also participated in the ceremony, along with Third District Supervisor Gary Patton, who represents Santa Cruz on the county Board of Supervisors.



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Clock lights symbolize mall's 'new birth,' according to Mayor Wormhoudt.