

OCT. 17, 1989; 5:04 P.M.

Sentinel photographers and reporters recount the earth-shattering events of a moment in time that still reverberates



'MISS GOOD GOVERNMENT'

WORMHOUDT CHANGED THE FACE OF SANTA CRUZ



Mardi Wormhoudt was the face of Santa Cruz as the city recovered from the quake.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

*Earthquake - 10 yrs later**10.17.09*

AS MAYOR DURING AND AFTER THE QUAKE,
LONGTIME POLITICIAN CREDITED FOR HER VISION

By WALLACE BAINE

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✓ **I**n October 1989, Mardi Wormhoudt was in her last few weeks as mayor of Santa Cruz. The mayor's job was then, and is now, rotated among those on the City Council, and the changeover from Wormhoudt to her successor, Jane Yokoyama, was due in November.

But, when November came, the Council broke with tradition and elected Wormhoudt to a second go-round as mayor. It was the first (and, thus far, only) time anyone has served back-to-back years.

The difference-maker was, of course, the Loma Prieta earthquake, which ravaged downtown Santa Cruz and instantly thrust Wormhoudt into local history.

IF YOU GO

LOMA PRIETA REMEMBRANCE

WHEN: Today, 4:30 p.m.**WHERE:** In front of Santa Cruz Post Office, Front and Water streets, Santa Cruz.**NOTE:** The Downtown Gala party following the Remembrance ceremony will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Rittenhouse Building, 1375 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz. Tickets are \$30. Professional business attire requested.**DETAILS:** 429-8433 or www.downtownsantacruz.com

The move to retain her was for continuity during a time when the city was still very much in distress. But it was also, say many who served on the Council at the time, an acknowledgement of Wormhoudt's efforts in leading the city's recovery in the days and weeks after Oct. 17.

On the 20th anniversary of Loma Prieta, Mardi Wormhoudt is on the minds of many Santa Cruzans, not only for her tenure as mayor during the worst crisis the city has faced in modern times. She is also facing serious illness, dealing with

SEE WORMHOUDT ON A2



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Two days after the quake, then Gov. George Deukmajian walked through downtown rubble with former Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, then-Rep. Leon Panetta, then-Assemblyman Sam Farr, then-Supervisors Fred Keeley, Jan Beautz, Gary Patton and Robley Levy.

WORMHOUDT

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the advanced stages of melanoma and in the care of Hospice. As a result, the "voice of Santa Cruz," as City Manager Dick Wilson called Wormhoudt during the earthquake period, cannot participate in today's commemoration.

Those close to her say that Wormhoudt never found it easy to discuss Loma Prieta in later years.

"It was a very difficult thing for her because of the loss of lives," said Wormhoudt's close friend Denise Holbert. "It really affected her in a very profound way. But she really stood up. She was the original Miss Good Government."

Joe Ghio was on the City Council in 1989 and was often a Wormhoudt adversary. He remembers, in the week after the quake, gazing at a map of downtown buildings at a Council meeting as the Council decided whether to allow the destruction of the iconic Cooper House.

"The Cooper House was one of the first decisions we had to make," he said. "And Mardi was really, really torn. We could all see how much it hurt her to vote yes (to tear it down)."

Wormhoudt immediately found herself at the vortex of attention after the quake. As mayor, she had to be the go-between among an intimidating variety of groups: the media, outside political dignitaries (including Gov. George Deukmejian and President George H.W. Bush), police, the City Council, the city staff, county and state officials, downtown merchants, property owners and residents displaced by the closed Palomar and St. George hotels.

"She was really extraordinary in a very bleak and trying time," said City Manager Wilson.

On the first night after the earth-

quake, Wilson said, Wormhoudt was on hand at the collapsed Coffee Roasting Co. building where a search team was working to rescue a woman trapped in the rubble. Engineers were insisting that the search be postponed until daylight due to the dangerous state of the part of the building that still stood, while crowds gathered demanding the search continue. Wormhoudt, he said, defused a very tense situation.

"Mardi's performance was heroic," he said.

Once the victims had all been accounted for, the city had to face the prospect of rebuilding the downtown. Wormhoudt was among those who came up with the idea that later became Vision Santa Cruz, a 36-person task force designed to build a consensus on what the new downtown would look like. Of the council members installed on the Vision Santa Cruz panel, Wormhoudt tapped her potential adversary Ghio over her ally John Laird, who had preceded her as mayor.

Before the earthquake, the City Council had been famously divided along political lines between pro-business interests and progressives. After the quake, say many involved in city politics at the time, Wormhoudt, a solid progressive, worked to downplay those differences.

"There was not a tradition with Mardi in dealing with the business community (before the quake)," said Larry Pearson, a Vision Santa Cruz member who owns the Pacific Cookie Co. "If there's a triumph to be savored here, it's how well this community came together for a united effort. Any differences we had with Mardi was, at that point, was a difference in comrades."

Still, said William Domhoff, the co-author of "Leftmost City: Power and Progressive Politics in Santa Cruz," Wormhoudt was careful not to compromise too much.

"Mardi had to take a strong stand because the downtown land and building owners were trying to capitalize on the crisis to expand the downtown and gain traction against the progressives politically."

"The cooperation was really against the grain," said Gary Patton who served as county supervisor at the time for the Third District, which included downtown Santa Cruz. "It's probably best to say that everyone was jockeying for position with elbows out. Nobody was entirely happy with the result, and, in some cases, they felt they were giving in to people they didn't really like. But they got it done. It would have been very easy to dig in their heels and blame the other side. But everyone just willed themselves to get along and do what needed to be done."

John Laird said that council members, despite their differences, found unanimity on the need to act and act quickly.

"Under Mardi's leadership, we basically decided to approve any rebuilding project the night it came to us. It was, delegate it and move it out the door," Laird said.

Ghio, who often clashed with Wormhoudt but ultimately came to respect her, said that she had a way that sometimes antagonized people.

"But I worked with Mardi very well. She was a good force at the time."

"She didn't have personal animosities; she only had political differences," said Andy Schiffrin, Wormhoudt's aide when she served on the County Board of Supervisors after her time on the City Council.

Schiffrin said that Wormhoudt found Loma Prieta to be a troublesome subject.

"It brought up a lot of emotion for her," he said. "Sometimes, people lose sight of that when it comes to political officials, but she feels very strongly about Santa Cruz. (The earthquake recovery) was very personal."