

Are we ready for the next big one?



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Kate Sandusky and daughter Morgan take inventory of their earthquake kit at their Aptos home.

Earthquake Ten years later

Stark memories prompt residents to preparedness

By **DONNA JONES**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

APTOS — By the time Redwood Drive resident Sandy Lydon hiked into neighboring Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, nearly two weeks had passed since the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

By then the well-known local historian had cruised through the rubble of downtown Santa Cruz and Watsonville and seen the images of the broken Bay Bridge.

But the magnitude of the event didn't hit home until, during his walk, he came across what appeared to be 5-foot juniper trees scattered on the floor of the forest and realized he was looking at the snapped tops of redwoods.

"That image — the one of a 100-foot second-growth redwood being whipped back and forth so suddenly that its green, pliable top snapped off — haunts me to this day," Lydon said.

Each year, on the Oct. 17 anniversary of the 5:04 p.m. earthquake, he returns to the woods to recapture the sense of humility he felt when he saw the downed trees.

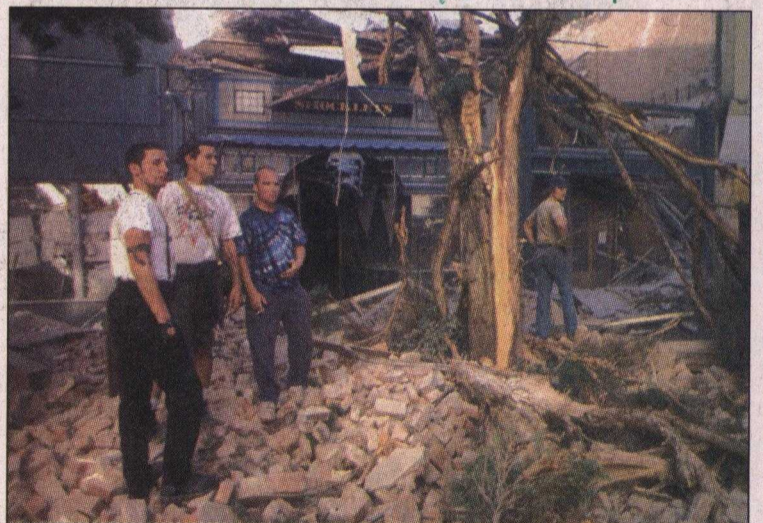
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SANDY LYDON,
APTOS RESIDENT

Outside, in the man-made world, people have tried to obliterate the memory, rebuilding structures and lives and minimizing memorials, Lydon said. They don't want to think about just how shaky the ground is on which they've built their lives, he said.

Forgetting about catastrophes allows people to move on, he said. The problem is that it also diminishes their ability to prepare for future cataclysms.

Lydon wants to jog memories so the next time nature dishes out a disaster the community will be



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Stunned pedestrians survey the damage on Pacific Avenue shortly after the 1989 quake.

ready. Last fall he started in his neighborhood, leading an effort to train residents to cope with emergencies. So far, residents from more than a quarter of the neighborhood's households have participated in the Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT, training, sponsored by the Aptos/La Selva Fire District.

Today, Lydon returns to Nisene Marks to lead a sold-out hike that will include presentations on his

COMING tomorrow

Return to the epicenter

Sentinel staff writer Donna Jones joins geologists as they venture into the depths of Forest of Nisene Marks State Park to visit the epicenter of the Loma Prieta earthquake.

LOMA PRIETA EARTHQUAKE: 15 YEARS LATER

Prepare: Residents learn how to handle next big one

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tory, geology and emergency preparedness. The daylong event, organized through Cabrillo College Extension, will raise money to purchase radio equipment for Redwood Drive CERT.

"There's no statute of limitations on getting the lesson," Lydon said. "Maybe we're getting it, at least in this neighborhood."

Getting ready

Redwood Drive is a narrow, tree-lined road that snakes 2.2 miles uphill along a steep canyon carved by Aptos Creek.

For a community so close to the Loma Prieta epicenter — Lydon's home is 2.5 miles southwest of the site — the rural neighborhood got off comparatively lightly in the quake. A couple of homes were badly damaged, Lydon said. The pipes owned by a small water system ruptured, leaving about 30 homes without service, and a large propane tank slipped from its supports and rolled into the woods, leaking fumes into the air. Repairs were made, and within a few months life returned to normal.

But nature continued to issue wake-up calls.

Kate Sandusky moved to Redwood Drive in August 2002, and quickly realized caring for two children in a rural neighborhood was going to require more knowledge than she needed at her former home on Santa Cruz's Westside.

"That December, a tree fell on the road and knocked out power for two days and we couldn't get out," she said. "I needed to know I could handle it. With the earthquake (in mind), it was nerve-racking. I felt if I had more information, I'd be more calm and reasonable."

When the opportunity for CERT training came along, Sandusky signed up.

Through the free 22-hour course San-

dusky and her neighbors have learned everything from what to pack up ahead of time to how to assess whether a building is safe enough to enter for a rescue. The idea is to give people the tools to first take care of themselves and then their neighbors.

"We've learned in huge disasters local resources are overwhelmed, and we're not going to be able to count on outsiders to bring resources to us," said Fire Capt. Mike Conrad, who coordinates the Aptos/La Selva CERT program with funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "Neighbors who go through the training can handle a large percentage of the problems they would encounter."

Redwood Drive CERT member Jose Mendoza said much of the training was common sense, once he thought about it. The problem was too often, he didn't. Now with the training in the back of his mind, it's second nature to snag extra water bottles during a trip to Costco or to stash copies of important documents in another location in case the house doesn't survive the disaster.

"Once you start thinking about these things, it doesn't take much organizing," Mendoza said. "It happens on the fly."

Next steps

If there's any doubt disasters will strike again, Lydon points to the history.

Along with UC Santa Cruz geologist Gary Griggs, he is writing a book about natural disasters in the Monterey Bay region during the past three centuries. The region has experienced hundreds of catastrophes in that time, and he ticked off just a few that have afflicted the area in the past couple of decades: fire, flood, mudslides, droughts, freezes, and, of course, a major earthquake that killed six people in Santa Cruz County.

That's why Conrad wants to spread the CERT program beyond the five already trained neighborhoods in the Aptos/La Selva district. The district started its program in the early 1990s, he said. But with no procedures in place to maintain response teams, the program lapsed. It was brought back about four years ago. In addition to the initial training, the district offers refresher courses and has set up procedures for ongoing communication with trained neighborhoods.

Now, the goal is to reach more neighborhoods in the district and throughout the county, Conrad said.

Santa Cruz Fire Department offers CERT training, Scotts Valley Fire Department recently launched a program, and in the San Lorenzo Valley, the nonprofit Mountain Community Resources is spearheading a project in conjunction with local volunteer fire departments and other emergency response groups. The group will present its first course in November.

Copper Resnik, who coordinates the San Lorenzo Valley project, has lived in Boulder Creek for 10 years.

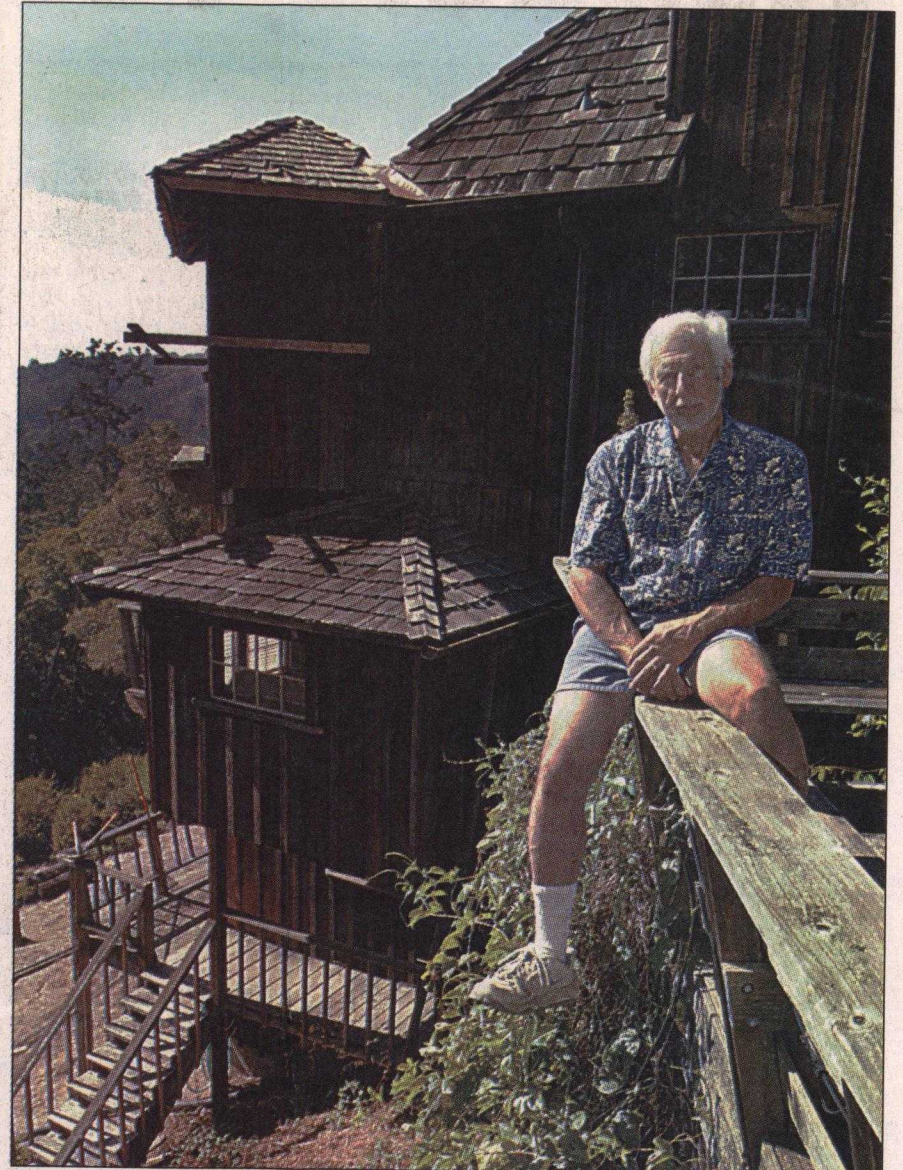
"I moved up here from the city, and I didn't know anything," she said. "But after you weather those first couple of storms, you get your disaster preparedness kit ready."

The CERT program takes preparations to the next level, Resnik said.

"Having someone in place until the first responder gets there, especially in a place this isolated, is crucial," she said.

The Mountain Community Resources program has five openings for the November training, which takes place on four consecutive Wednesdays, starting Nov. 3 and concluding with a Saturday presentation Dec. 4. For information, call 336-3919.

Contact Donna Jones at djones@santacruzsentinel.com.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Sandy Lydon, whose Aptos Hills neighborhood overlooks the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, is the leader of his neighborhood emergency response team.