

Watsonville rebounds from quake

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■ Follow-up: The city's spirits are rising along with a restored church and school.

BY PAULINE ZENNER
Special to the Mercury News

Construction sites never looked so good to Watsonville residents, who eagerly await the rebuilding of two of the city's landmarks that fell victim to the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

As the new St. Patrick's Church and Watsonville High School administration and performing arts center arise, so do the spirits of those who have been displaced by the loss of the buildings.

"Everyone is breathing a sigh of relief," said the Rev. Michael Miller, speaking for St. Patrick's 4,000 parishioners.

"The disorder and disorientation have been good for us, and we're better friends because of it, but we're really excited to know that we're seriously on our way to having a new church."

Miller, whose congregation has had to attend makeshift services at Notre Dame Gymnasium on Brennan Street for more than three years, said he hopes the church will be inhabitable for services by St. Patrick's Day next year.

"I know it won't have all its furnishings by then, but if the exterior is complete, we will be happy," Miller said.

When complete, a \$3.8 million replica of the 90-year-old Gothic-style church will stand tall at the city's gateway.

"We still need to raise \$1.6 million to build the new church," Miller said. "It's more difficult than I thought it would be, but then it's hard economic times for everyone."

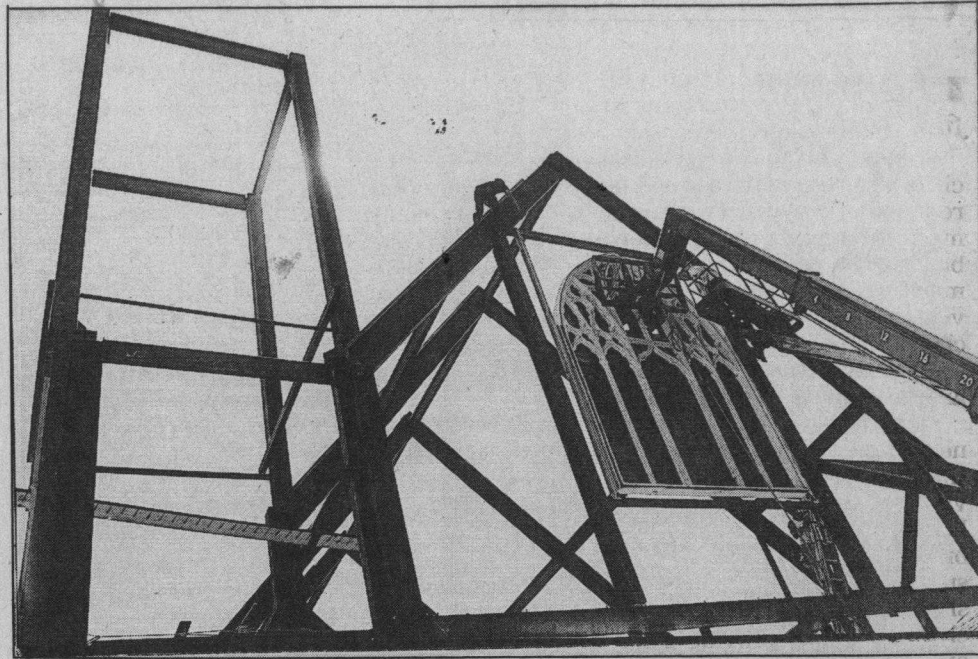
Roger Mock, principal of Watsonville

High School, said he and the administration staff are looking forward to completion of the two-story building that will house administration, social studies classes and a large performing arts center. Because of a heavy rainy season, the project is about four months behind schedule.

"The July 15 completion date was moved to Aug. 15, and now we're realistically thinking it may be November or December before we can move the students in," Mock said. "We've had to adjust to so many things. The staff is pretty understanding, though. What's a few more months?"

Detouring students and staff around the construction site for the past year has caused chaos and overcrowded hallways, Mock said.

"It will be nice to be back in one building again and not spread out in portables," he said.



GREG PIO — SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY NEWS

Taking shape in Watsonville is the new St. Patrick's Church.