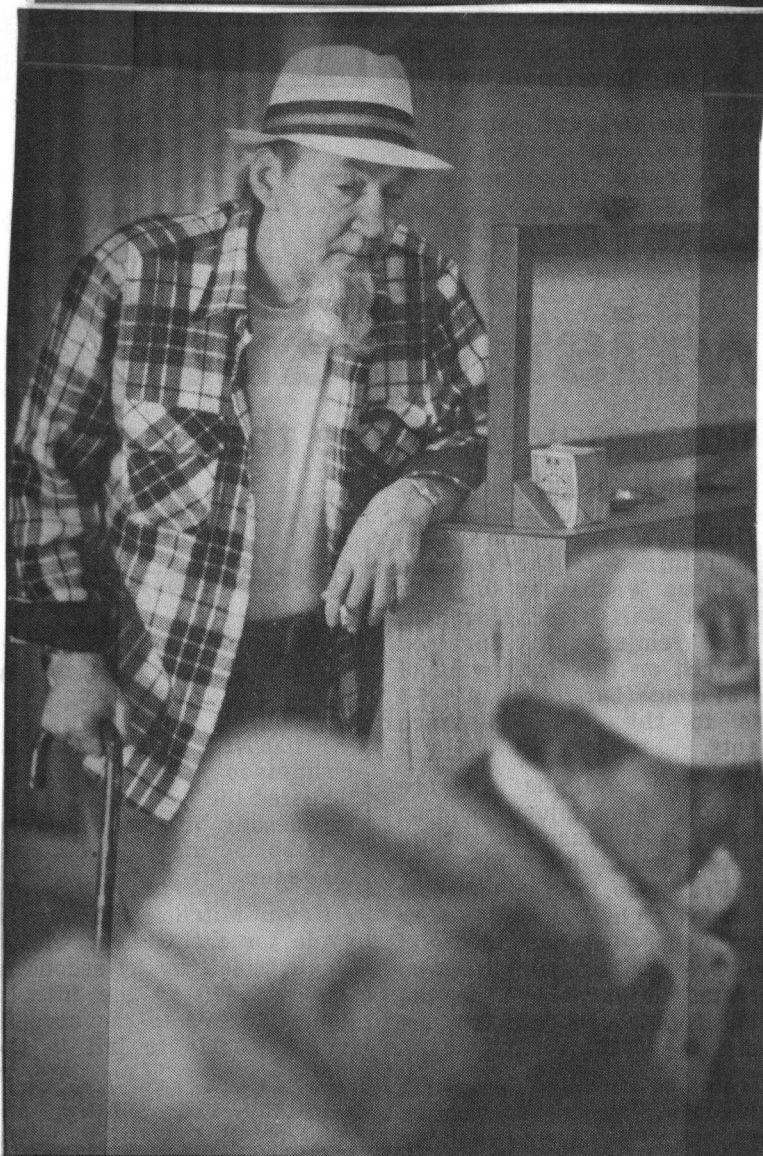




A look inside a downtown institution

Text and photos by Kurt Ellison



Top right, Jubentino Rodrigues, seated at left, Isadore Blanco and Alfred Irao play 'mostro,' a traditional favorite, as Dioscoro Recio looks on. Poker chips come in \$3 and \$5 stacks, at right. Above, Gordon Soliday, who lives at the nearby Wall Street Inn, stops in to watch a game or two.

ON A RECENT Saturday afternoon, friends gathered out of the rain at the Philippine Gardens card room on West Beach Street to play cards and just pass the time away. The retired and semi-retired men meet here often to play a rummy-like game they call "mostro," paying 50 cents for a half-hour of cards, and \$3 or \$5 for a stack of poker chips. A murmur of English, Spanish, Tagalog — and laughter — swirls softly around the room.

This is the fifth location for the Philippine Gardens, Rosita Tabasa, the proprietor for 51 years, said. Each relocation made way for new city projects, the latest being the buyout and demolition of the 200 block of Main Street in 1986 to make room for the new post office. After a year in limbo, the card room reopened on West Beach Street in November 1987.

Tabasa said she regretted that the current version of the Philippine Gardens is too small for a restaurant, which had been a feature of her earlier ventures. But despite the lack of cooked meals, avid monstro players have returned, gathering as they have for a half-century in downtown Watsonville.