

Hospital moves to new site

Hospital - Watsonville Hospital

SJm 4 17-98

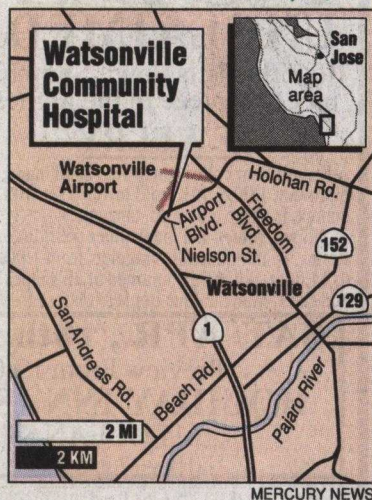
■ Watsonville:
Health care
advocates monitor
planned sale.

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Nearly nine years after the Loma Prieta earthquake damaged Watsonville Community Hospital, the community Sunday will celebrate the move of southern Santa Cruz County's only hospital into a new home.

But even as work crews prepare for the grand opening of the medical campus, a coalition of health advocates, community organizations and labor representatives are monitoring the impending sale of the century-old non-profit institution to the for-profit Tennessee-based Community Health Systems, a national chain.

"We value the hospital's role in providing health care in the community and would like that role to con-



tinue," said Arcadio Viveros, executive director of Salud Para La Gente in Watsonville and a coalition spokesman. "We're concerned that if a for-profit organization buys it... they might forget the wishes the community has for its hospital."

Hospital officials are negotiating
See **HOSPITAL**, Page 4B

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS | Local | FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 1998

Watsonville welcomes new hospital

■ HOSPITAL

from Page 1B

terms of the sale to Community Health Services. They promised to make the details of the sale public when the deal is finalized.

Members of the Pajaro Valley Coalition to Save Community Health Care want to ensure the impending change from a non-profit to a for-profit concern does not result in a reduction of staff and that medically indigent and uninsured patients continue to receive free or low-cost medical care.

They also want to make sure the sale is subject to adequate public review and input. The Watsonville City Council voted this week to endorse the coalition's principles.

John Friel, chief executive officer of Watsonville Community Hospital said contents of the upcoming agreement will be made public once they are completed and submitted to the state Attorney General's office — probably in early May — for

review. Public comment on the documents would be accepted before the Attorney General rules on the matter 120 later.

"This community has a high percentage of uninsured people because it's in a rural area," said Carmen Figueroa, a labor representative for the California Nurses Association. "That's (one reason) why it's so important for us to get access to all the terms of the sale."

Friel said Watsonville Community Hospital's guidelines are similar to the coalition's. He added that Community Health Systems was accepted as a buyer following a two-year search because the company is experienced in operating hospitals in rural areas and its administration shared the same goals as the current owners.

"The community's assets will stay here in Watsonville," Friel said.

Health care workers will begin treating patients at the new Watsonville Community Hospital at 75 Nielson Street on April 26, providing the

state licensing board approves the site during next week's inspection.

To celebrate the move from the old earthquake damaged facility on Green Valley Road, hospital officials will conduct a ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new site on Sunday. After the ceremony, officials will conduct tours of the new facility.

"We're encouraging people to see what their new community hospital has to offer," Friel said. He added with a smile: "I'm telling people it's the only time you'll be in the operating room fully clothed and wide awake."

The move comes nearly nine years after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake damaged the four-story hospital building on Green Valley Road. The soil beneath the hospital liquefied during the 7.1-magnitude earthquake, causing the foundation to sink and sewer lines running below the building to crack. Officials determined it was more cost-effective to move rather than repair the 30-year-old building.

After a lengthy site search, the hospital bought a building near the Watsonville Municipal Airport from Seagate, and converted the structure — originally designed to manufacture computer disk drives — to house its outpatient and administrative services. A three-story, 100,000-square-foot building was constructed on an adjacent parcel to accommodate a 100-bed hospital.

The \$73 million project was funded partly by \$45 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and \$5 million from the state Office of Emergency Services. The rest of the money came from hospital reserves and borrowed funds, Friel said.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The new Watsonville Community Hospital is at 75 Nielson Street in Watsonville. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is set for 2 p.m. Sunday, followed by an open house from 3 to 5 p.m. It will open for patient treatment April 26.