

Reyna Ruiz steps down as center director

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SANTA CRUZ — After 12 years serving as director of the Beach Flats Community Center, Reyna Ruiz is stepping down to take some time to figure out what she's going to do next in life.

Ruiz, a stalwart of the community center who is largely credited with keeping it afloat when it faced closure, marked her last day as director Wednesday with little fanfare.

"I'm not good with good-byes," she said. "I feel like sometimes in your life, you need to take a moment to step back and take stock, and figure out what's next."

She plans to remain an active member of the neighborhood, where she lives with her boyfriend and three children.

"It's been quite a ride," Ruiz said. "We've strived to make sure we improved the quality of the lives of the adults and children here."

The Los Angeles native started working at the cen-

ter in 1992 as a volunteer while attending UC Santa Cruz, and she became director in 2000. She said she'd always wondered

what precisely it was about the Beach Flats neighborhood that conjured up such negativity and she wanted to find a way to get involved in making a difference.

"The kids here are fabulous — they inspire me," Ruiz said. "When I see Beach Flats now, it's not what I remember seeing in 2000 or what I remember seeing in 1992, but the constant is what I see in the kids."

The center faced imminent closure in late 2008 because of the city's budget woes, but that wasn't going to happen on Ruiz's watch. She helped form a partnership with the Walnut Avenue Women's Center to take the Beach Flats center under its wing temporarily. That allowed the center to build a website, raise money



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and gather an advisory group of community leaders to figure out what to do next. Ruiz was instrumental in raising \$130,000 through individual donations and grants to keep it going, allowing the center to continue a wealth of youth and family programs and resources.

In late 2009, the center got a major boost when it partnered with Community Bridges, which added it to its family of programs that includes the Live Oak Family Resource Center, La Mazana Community Resources, Familia Center and Mountain Community Resources.

"She is a passionate, dedicated advocate," said Sam Storey, CEO of Community Bridges. "She has worked tirelessly — I gained a lot of respect and admiration for her commitment to the Beach Flats community."

One of Ruiz' proudest achievements has been establishing a board of advisers made up of representatives from the neighborhood as well as working tirelessly to help secure the center's future

by diversifying its funding sources.

"I've learned so much from her, including how to maximize the resources we have, and I've been able to take that to my own life as well," said Lidia Montesino, who currently serves as program director and has been involved with the center since 1997.

Yolanda Henry, current director of Familia Center, which serves the Beach Flats and Lower Ocean neighborhoods, will serve as interim director after Ruiz' departure while maintaining her current position.

"I leave knowing it will continue to be a great resource for the community," Ruiz said. "I think Yolanda's going to be fabulous."

Though her departure is bittersweet, Ruiz ends her tenure knowing the center has achieved immensely.

"I can leave proud — I've worked with awesome people," she said. "It's in great hands."