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Kurt Ellison

Board members take the roll at their first meeting last night: from left, Michael Havens-Cook, Sylvia

Rios-Metcalf, Jean Zlotkin, Simone Mortan and Sandy Martin.

## Aromas school board rolls up its sleeves

By EMILIO ALVARADO  
STAFF WRITER

The five members of the board of trustees for the newly formed Aromas-San Juan school district were sworn into office yesterday, and they didn't waste any time getting down to business.

The board members, Jean Zlotkin, Simone Mortan, Sandy Martin, Sylvia Rios-Metcalf and Michael Havens-Cook, took the oath of office yesterday at the San Benito County Office of Education in Hollister. It was two years ago this month that a small group of people from Aromas went to that same office with a petition requesting a merger between the two elementary schools.

Mortan said the two years since then have been difficult.

"If we had looked at the whole task at the beginning, it would be too large to deal with," said Mortan, who was selected clerk of the board. She said the work was made easier by taking each task "one at a time."

The current five-member San Juan Bautista school district board of trustees will have jurisdiction over its school until July 1, when the new board takes the reins for both schools. The Paj-

aro Valley school district will likewise keep control over Aromas School until then.

After being sworn in, the new board convened at Aromas School at 5 p.m. for its first meeting. Although board members seemed a little nervous running their first meeting in front of about 22 spectators, they set into motion a series of steps to get the new district rolling.

The board appointed Zlotkin as its president and named the new district the Aromas-San Juan Bautista Unified School District. Next, the board formed a set of special committees to manage the district's various needs, with trustees volunteering to serve on the committees.

Zlotkin was appointed to head the committee that will draft the district's 1991-92 budget. Other committees will look into transportation, expanding Aromas School, searching for a site for a high school to be built within five years, minority student affairs, staff development and district administrative duties.

Until permanent offices are found, the district's central office will be in San Juan Bautista. The board hopes to get a loan of about \$71,000 from the

state within a few weeks to pay for administrative and housing costs.

Although the ordeal of forming a new district presented numerous challenges and problems, it was a task welcomed by board members.

"It's been up and down — a roller coaster," said Rios-Metcalf. But she said it was worth the struggle.

The push for having Aromas School secede from Pajaro Valley Unified School District and join San Juan Bautista Elementary School was started by a few parents from Aromas who wanted more control over their children's education. They argued that the Pajaro Valley school district was too large to give Aromas School the special attention it needed.

Last fall, unification proponents won a major battle when the state Board of Education gave the go-ahead to having the matter settled at the voting booth in the June 5 primary. It approved the election and ruled that only people living in the two schools' attendance areas would be allowed to vote.

In June, the measure passed by a narrow margin and the five board members were elected to

serve on the new school district's board. All five candidates supported unification.

The matter seemed to end with the election, but then the federal government stepped into the picture just after the primary.

The Department of Justice's Voting Rights Division wanted to review the election process for possible violations of the federal Voting Rights Act. Section 5 of that law regulates any changes in voting procedures and requires that those changes be approved by the department before they are put in place. The election had not been approved by the department and it threatened to nullify it.

Late last month, the department approved the election, a move which apparently has closed the book on the matter.

At last night's board meeting, trustees decided to meet on the first and third Mondays of every month, switching the meetings between Aromas and San Juan. Meetings will be held a 7 p.m. one month and 4 p.m. the next month.

The next meeting will be held Oct. 8 at 7 p.m. at the San Juan School.