

Earthquake 1989 - Watsonville 10-26-89

Quake leaves behind tent cities of refugees

By JAMIE MARKS
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — The dank smell of wet clothes and mud mingles with the zesty aroma of chili from the tent city at Ramsay Park.

Rows upon rows of tents, covering rows upon rows of cots, are stacked next to each other where the Watsonville Pony League used to play.

National Guardsmen in uniform stand by, ready to disburse food and clothing to the endless streams of homeless and hungry.

Welcome to tent city, home to hundreds of displaced families following last week's 7.1 shattering earthquake.

They come from Watsonville, Freedom and even Pajaro in north Monterey County to get food and comfort at this shelter, one of four official refuges run by the American Red Cross in the Pajaro Valley.

Some can go home but are afraid to be indoors

for fear another earthquake will send the walls tumbling down on them.

"We're afraid to go in," said Maria Sanchez, who is expecting a baby boy next month. "Our house is OK by Fifth and Rodriguez streets, but no one wants to be there anymore. I just hope my baby will be OK."

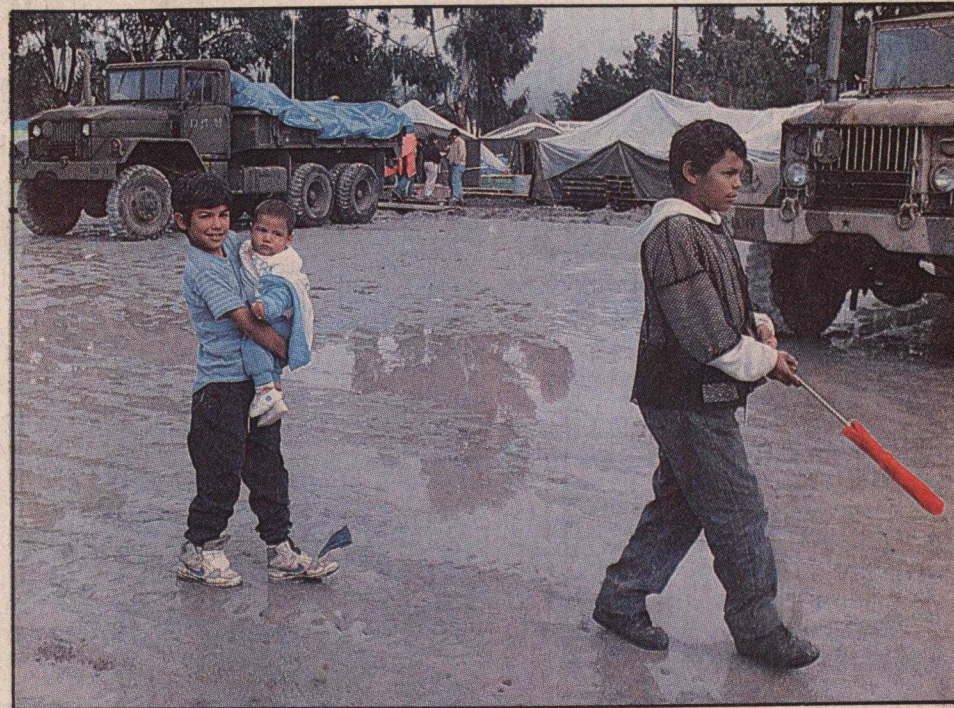
For others, there is simply no more home. "I really want to get out of here because of my

4-year-old," said Sylvia Miller. "This isn't a good place for him.

"What I need is my house, some place I can relax in. This place — they do all right. But I have no money to move. And that's all I want right now," she said.

Some 1,200 people have been displaced by last week's earthquake, and finding a safe shelter for them has been a monumental task for city officials.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Ramsay Park in Watsonville has the look and smell of a war-zone camp.

Tent/ Homeless crowd camp

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Immediately after the quake, families camped out wherever they could find some open space — at Watsonville High's soccer field, at a construction lot on Pennsylvania Drive, at the vacant 200 block of Main Street, and at Callaghan Park.

Fearing health risks from inadequate cover, city officials convinced all but the defiant campers at Callaghan Park to move to Red Cross shelters. And as night fell Wednesday, Callaghan Park campers were beginning to relocate.

At Ramsay Park, Red Cross officials were puzzled why more people hadn't taken advantage of their shelter.

"We're not full, only half full,"

said a tired volunteer. "Some are still coming, but we'd like more to be here."

Confusion has hampered the effort to shelter the many homeless. The tents arrived over the weekend, but wooden floors didn't get there until Wednesday, making the tent city a mudhole following Monday's downpour.

Heaters were promised for each tent, but after finding so many young children at the camp, the Red Cross decided to take them out to prevent any accidental burns or fires.

Lights for the tents were to come by Wednesday night.

On the bright side, a woman and her daughter from Stockton drove into the camp with a van full of nice clothes and shoes. Dozens of

people gathered around to grab the offerings.

Officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency came Wednesday to tell about applying for assistance.

And Red Cross officials continually assured the Mexican-Americans in the camp that the Border Patrol would not be allowed in the shelters. Some undocumented residents had feared they would be deported if they sought help.

"We're here to help, not deport people," said a Red Cross volunteer.

Still, as Manuel Maldoca said in Spanish, "It's difficult. My kids need medicines, we need food. There are seven of us and we need a place to live until we find a new home."