



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Worker Rich Vigil totes rebar steel through the Watsonville High project Wednesday.

# Earthquake - 1989 - Watsonville Rebuilding **Quake recovery taking shape at Watsonville High School**

## **New complex includes performing arts center**

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WATSONVILLE — New classrooms, administrative offices and a sparkling performing arts center at Watsonville High School should be completed just in time for the opening of classes next fall, school officials said Wednesday.

The replacement buildings for 72-year-old wings of the school rendered useless by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake are taking shape, gloriously, at the corner of East Beach and Lincoln streets.

"It's coming along," said Richard Meyer, director of construction and governmental relations for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District.

The two-story, \$5.4 million Spanish revival-style complex will be home to 13 classrooms, offices for principals, counselors and others, and an 850-seat performing arts facility.

Barring unforeseen circumstances — such as a lot of unseasonal rain — Meyer said the project should be completed by the end of August, just in time for students and school officials to move in.

Heavy rains this winter set construction back about a month, and Meyer joked that "small and medium-sized miracles are welcome" to ensure the project gets finished in time for the next school year.

"Right now we're really on the cutting edge of trying to get kids into the classrooms and staff into the administrative space," he said.

The crown jewel of the project is a new performing arts theater that city and school officials pre-

dict will be the focal point of future Pajaro Valley cultural events. The theater — planned with the help of the Pajaro Valley Performing Arts Council — will be 50 percent larger than its creaky predecessor.

When the state balked at paying for an auditorium that was much larger than the previous facility — allotting \$4.3 million in bond revenue to replace only what was there before — the city of Watsonville contributed \$1.2 million in Measure E earthquake-tax proceeds to pay for design and expansion.

The city also chipped in an additional \$400,000 in redevelopment funds to pay for seats, and sound and lighting equipment, said Meyer.

Funneling \$1.6 million to the performing arts hall, said City Councilman Lowell Hurst, was a way to "invest in the community to help facilitate the construction of an arts center that neither the city or the school could afford to build alone."

The partnership between the city, the school district and the arts council "can bring an element of culture and performing arts to the south county that it's never had before," said Hurst, a teacher at the high school.

"If the community gets behind this, it could really do some positive things for us," Hurst said.

The Watsonville High students, who have been dodging heavy equipment and attending many of their classes in portable buildings since January 1992, are "very anxious to use the new building," said Hurst. "They're watching the construction eagerly."

Last fall, the board approved naming the auditorium the Henry Mello Performing Arts Center, after the state senator whom Meyer said was instrumental in securing state funding for the project.