

# People won't leave park

EARTHQUAKE '89 - Watsonville

## Watsonville quake homeless stay put

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WATSONVILLE — Callaghan Park tent city has become the People's Park of Watsonville. To some it's a symbol, to others it's a political grandstand, and to many more, it's a necessity.

Despite pressure from city and Red Cross officials to relocate, the campers here have steeled their resolve to stay put.

"We are organized and we will stay until we find a place to move," said Josefina Rojas, one of some 150 low-income Latinos living in the park.

Rojas is an unemployed field and frozen-food worker whose apartment on Union Street was destroyed in the Oct. 17 earthquake. Although her 4-year-old daughter has become sick living under the tent, Rojas said Callaghan Park is a better place to live than any of the alternatives that

have been offered.

Callaghan Park tent city sprang up minutes after the quake rocked the downtown neighborhoods, felling 195 homes.

City officials have never sanctioned the park, and have continued to meet with campers to urge them to move to the other shelters.

"We're not going to force them out, but we're not going to support them beyond what we already have," said Councilman Dennis Osmer. "The conditions there are worse than at any other shelter."

Some of those shelters are beginning to close. Red Cross official Robert Hernandez said the Vets Hall on East Beach Street will close as temporary shelter by Sunday because the owners want the building vacated. The 100 or so people there are being moved to the county fairgrounds.

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And ultimately, the Red Cross is hoping to close Ramsay Park tent city, because officials want the homeless families out of the tents and into better shelter, said Nancy Alquist, another Red Cross official.

So the options are beginning to narrow for the 150 or so people that still inhabit Callaghan Park.

Ten of the Callaghan Park families have been offered temporary housing at the Buena Vista migrant labor camp, said Enrique Alvarado, one of the leaders of the Callaghan campers.

But the Red Cross's Hernandez said "nine out of the 10 don't have cars and want to stay here (at the park). There's no bus transportation. I don't think they'll move.

"One guy told me, 'We all move or we all stay,'" Hernandez said. "But as the Red Cross, we don't deal that way. We deal with individuals.

"Another guy told me he was paying \$600 a month in rent. His landlord is fixing up his place and will charge \$825 a month in rent. He doesn't have a job, so how's he supposed to afford that?" Hernandez said. Hernandez said he's been told

that several landowners have decided not to rent to the families at Callaghan Park again because they had two and three families living under one roof.

"We're trying to get everybody placed elsewhere, but in reality, there are some that didn't have a home to begin with," Hernandez said.

Besides the physical woes of the campers, there is dissension among them over political tactics.

Alvarado, one of the organizers of the tent city, and Sal Mendez, who lost his apartment on Union Street, said they resent City Council candidate Oscar Rios, who has come to the park many times to give political speeches about the people's rights.

"I don't like it at all," said Mendez. "It's politics. They promise all this stuff and walk away."

Alvarado said he's trying to focus on the "common sense" solution.

"Rios comes here and uses politics. I would be back-stabbing these people if I did that," Alvarado said.

But Rios said his critics are trying to wage a campaign to discredit him.