

Church honors its history



The Rev. Steven Moran shows the front of the original sanctuary of Casa Del Alfarero church, which is celebrating 60 years at its current site in Watsonville. Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Churches-2000

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Casa Del Alfarero to celebrate 60 years in Watsonville beginning Thursday



Tavita and William Carlon were married at Casa Del Alfarero church. They celebrated their 50th anniversary there in 2005. Contributed

By ERIC ANDERSON

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

When Tavita Carlon got married, the ceremony took place at Casa Del Alfarero church.

When it came time for her and her husband, William, to celebrate their 25th and 50th wedding anniversaries, the Watsonville church was the site of the parties.

When William died in 2007, a celebration of his life was held there, too.

This week, Tavita Carlon will participate in another celebration at the church, but of a different sort. Casa Del Alfarero, which translates in English to "Potter's House," is commemorating 60 years in Watsonville with festivities on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and services on Sunday.

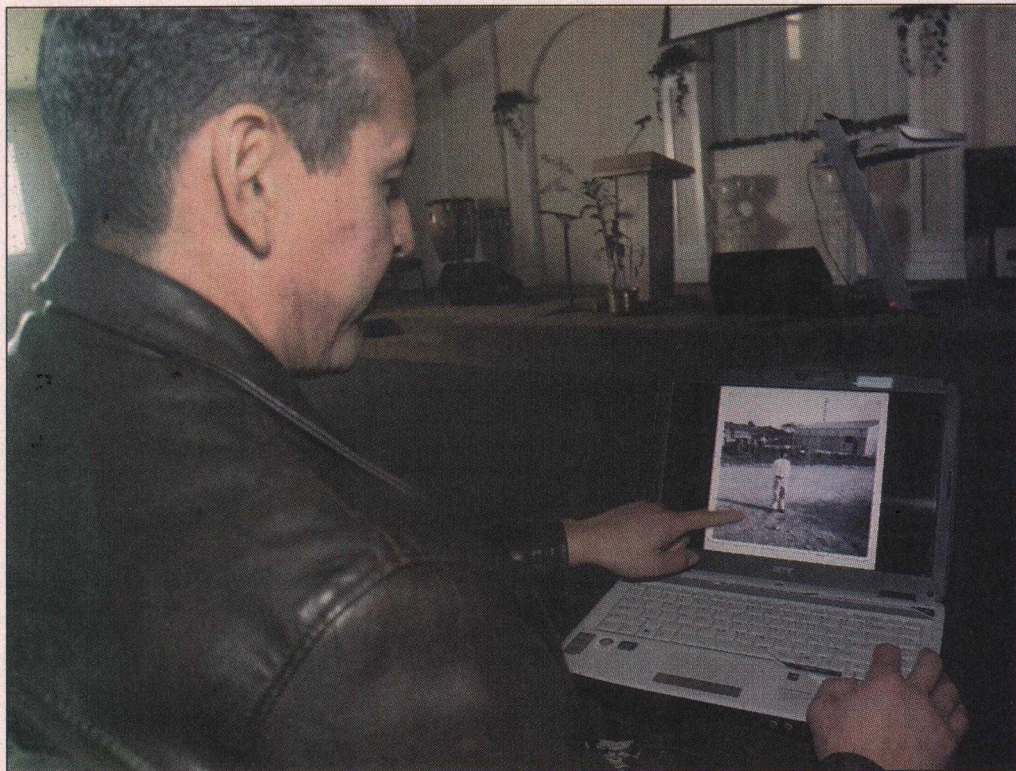
The church has never held a major anniversary celebration before.

"Everybody is looking forward to it," Carlon said. "They've never been to something like this. A lot of people haven't."

The church, which caters to many low-income families and farmworkers, has about 250 members and holds Spanish, English and Mixteco services. This week's celebration has a theme of "From Generation to Generation," as the church honors and commemorates its past with slide shows of old photographs, a dramatization of its history and other special events.

From the beginning, the church's history has been a story of resourcefulness.

When the original sanctuary — which would be replaced by the current, larger one that was dedicated in 1998 — was built,



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

The Rev. Steven Moran reviews a wealth of photos on his laptop computer as part of preparations for the church's 60th anniversary.

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members working on the demolition of a YMCA building didn't let that work go to waste.

"They would do demolitions and anything they thought they could use they would bring over here to use on the construction of the church," Pastor Steven Moran said.

When it comes time to fundraise — for everything from purchasing plots of land in the early days to adding the new sanctuary to less-ambitious projects — the community has repeatedly turned to its old standby, tamales.

Carlton, now 72, took an active role from the start. She began making tamales in 1951 and continued until about 2005, when she decided she couldn't do it anymore because of her husband's illness.

As one of the church's two longest-attending members, Carlton is playing an important role in this week's celebrations. She supplied Moran with a collection of more than 100 photographs, most of which her late husband took, that will be shown during the slide show.

The church's past seemed to



Contributed

Isidro Lopez was the first pastor at Casa Del Alfarero church 60 years ago.

come alive briefly Tuesday as Moran clicked through some of the old, black-and-white photos on his laptop computer. There was the man standing on East Front Street when it was a dirt road, then groups of young people gathering on Hecker Pass, then Carlton and her husband standing in front of an old car, then the church bordered by a dump and an agricultural field, instead of crowded apartment buildings like today.

Despite the changes and upgrades at the church, many of the challenges that existed

when Isidro Lopez — the church's first pastor — was installed Jan. 15, 1949, still exist today, especially those dealing with poverty issues. Over time, other battles have arisen, and the church has created programs — in addition to its economic-support programs — to help members battle drug addiction and to assist Mexican-born parents in communicating with their American-born children, among other things.

"Basically, we're just wanting to be a support system for the community," Moran said.

The church has certainly been a source of support for Carlton, through the good and the bad. She said it has played a central role in her life, saying that she didn't smoke, drink or dance, choosing to participate in church activities instead.

"It seems that when you go, you forget whatever problems you have on the outside," Carlton said. "You don't think about those things when you're there."

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Casa Del Alfarero's 60th anniversary celebration will be held Thursday and Friday at 7 p.m. and Saturday at 2 p.m. For information, call Associate Pastor Daniel Moran at 888-4463.