

Storm greets flood of shoppers

Merchants hopeful weekend's business start of something big

By MARDI BROWNING-DOUGLASS
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Sentinel staff writers

SANTA CRUZ — More trouble fell from the sky on the beleaguered merchants of downtown Santa Cruz Saturday. At the end of two days of record-breaking sales, rains threatened to close the pavilions that are temporarily housing most of the downtown merchants.

"We're going to sandbag and we're going to flash," said Matt Ferrell of the Public Works Department as he hurried from pavilion to pavilion checking the status of the leaks around the doors and walls of each one. "It's OK, we're going to fix it," he said. About six inches of water had pooled in front of Lily Wong's pavilion by around 6 p.m., and other pavilions' entry ways were in the same shape, with store owners hurriedly moving merchandise out of harm's way.

Shoppers were hitting the stores, despite the rain and the cold, the traffic and the parking problems. Downtown merchants were unanimous in their jubilation over the first days of sales in the temporary pavilions set up in city parking lots along Cedar Street, a block west of the mall.

"It's been just great, yesterday was more than double the business we had on the mall last year," said Richard Bayer, owner of Natural Treasures and Santa Cruz Nutrition Center, formerly of the Pacific Garden Mall but now situated side by side in Pavilion E. "People who normally wouldn't walk in the store off the street are coming in."

Some 40 merchants, whose stores were destroyed or heavily

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damaged, are selling their wares in the pavilions, which afford a total of 37,000 feet of retail space.

A number of other merchants have relocated to the Bank of America building at the corner of Pacific and Soquel avenues.

For many merchants, the strength of the Christmas season may tell whether they are able to survive and ultimately rebuild. The holiday season is said to account for about 40 percent of retail sales.

Cyclone fencing, which had cordoned off the entire mall since the 7.1 earthquake, was moved back over the weekend, opening up a third of the thoroughfare. Traffic now is allowed up as far as Walnut Avenue.

The remainder of the mall remains fenced off at that location.

Many of the buildings from Walnut Avenue northward have been demolished, including the Cooper House, the remodeled county courthouse which was the focal point of the mall when it opened 20 years ago.

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Shoppers laugh off rain in Santa Cruz, where storm couldn't dampen spirits Saturday.

Rain drenches county; Sierra socked with snow

By MARIA GAURA
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A long-overdue rainstorm walloped the county with blustery winds and brief, drenching rainshowers Saturday evening. The storm broke a month-long dry spell, but still left this year's rainfall totals trailing behind last year's.

The Pacific storm dumped over two inches of rain in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and nearly an inch in Santa Cruz, before it tapered off at about 9 p.m. Saturday. More rain is expected today, according to the National Weather Service.

Meanwhile, in the Sierra, the storm brought good news for skiers.

"The new storm brought about 16 more inches of snow," said Earle Davis, marketing director at the Boreal Ski Area in the Lake Tahoe region.

Business was also reported good at nearby Alpine Meadows.

"The last two days resulted in about 17 inches," said spokesman Dan Nourse. "The snow has been falling hard."

Saturday's downpour dampened the ardor of holiday shoppers around the county, and slowed freeway traffic to a 50-

mile-per-hour crawl at its peak. It triggered a minor rockslide onto Lompico Road, but otherwise caused no damage, according to fire and police agencies.

Mountain residents reported fierce winds, bitter temperatures and thick mists along with the rain. But the cracked mountainsides, fractured by the Oct. 17 earthquake, appeared to stand firm against the downpour. Geologists fear that cracks opened on mountain slopes by the quake could turn into landslides if saturated by heavy rainfall, but no landslips were reported Saturday.

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Pavilions/ Relocated merchants optimistic

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The mood downtown was festive Saturday, weather notwithstanding. The pavilions are still without heat, but Shandrydan owner Sandra Bartle said that the heating problem should soon be solved.

"I was told that heating for all these tents would run about \$20,000, and that they're working on it," she said. Her business at Pavilion B has been also been booming.

"I had the biggest day-after-Thanksgiving day ever," she said. "From what my customers are telling me, I think it will last, too. I'm sure it won't continue like it was the first day, but now I'm starting to think people are really going to be committed to shopping down here."

Merchants are pinning their hopes on local support and on the curiosity the new pavilions might generate elsewhere.

With Highway 17 open again, merchants are hoping for some big weekends filled with Santa Clara Valley shoppers.

San Jose Mayor Tom McEnery was just what the merchants were looking for Friday.

He came to the ribbon-cutting ceremony with a check in hand for \$85,000 for the Downtown Association. The money was part of a larger \$250,000 donation from the City of San Jose to the county for earthquake relief.

McEnery said his office had been deluged with calls offering help, including an unsolicited donation of \$100,000.

"We all know Santa Cruz is going to come back in a big way."

McEnery and Santa Cruz Vice Mayor Jane Yokoyama went shopping in one of the pavilions.

"The spirit of the people remains," Yokoyama said. "We have a renaissance in these Phoenix pavilions," she added.

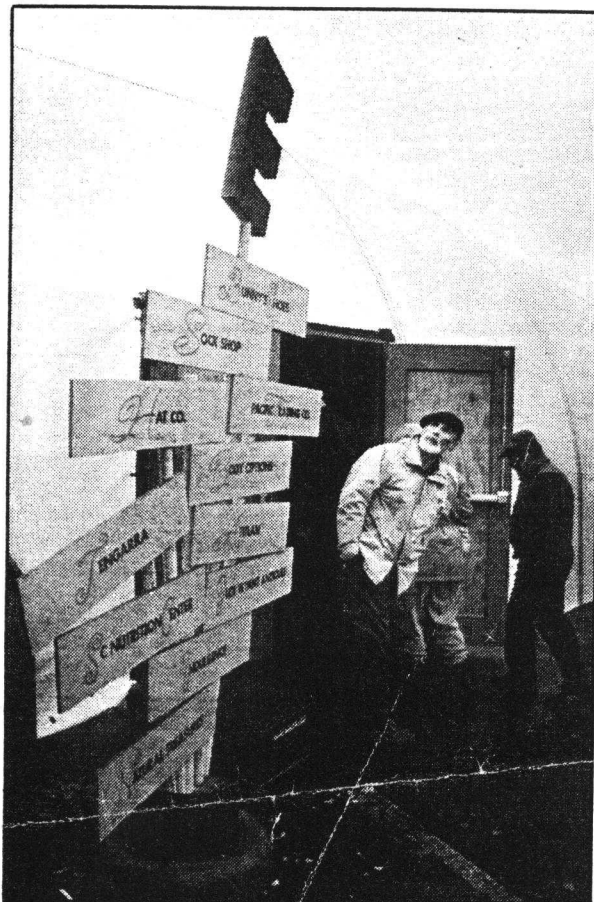
Shoppers came downtown from all over Saturday, either to start their Christmas shopping or just to show their support for local merchants. John and Susan Ray have been living in a motor home since their home in the summit area was destroyed in the Oct. 17 earthquake, but they came downtown to shop.

"We've been down here for a couple of hours and we actually have bought one Christmas gift," Susan said. "We're not real big shoppers but we're trying to support the local merchants," John added.

Even California Slim, the street singer who has been entertaining mall patrons with country music for 10 years now, said his business is up.

"It's hard to say how much it's up," he said. "I'm doing pretty well, it keeps me in guitar strings."

"Business is booming, we've had people come here all the way from Oakland," said Rose Kirkman, owner of Bowman-Forgey stationers. "Yesterday was unbelievable, we had a line all the way down to the back



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Eric Carruthers consults Pavilion E directory.

of the store."

Andy Adsit, his wife Kellie and two sons Steven and Nathan came over from San Jose to do their Christmas shopping.

"As a matter of fact, we heard about how they set up these temporary structures and how businesses needed the help," Andy said. "So we thought we'd come over and see."

Merchants have been worried that the curiosity will wear off, Bayer said.

"The most difficult thing was the uncertainty," he said. "Most of us didn't really get to set up our stores until Tuesday, and people were exhausted, emotionally and physically, wondering if everyone will just come until Christmas, and then we'll go bankrupt!"

Some stores actually on the Pacific Garden Mall are open for business as usual. Woolworth's, The Gap, Rader's, Changes and Bowman and Forgey are just a



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Customers browse at Bookshop Santa Cruz.

few that are operating on the Mall itself, and others like the Vault and the ID Building are working from their back doors. These shops have been filled with customers this weekend as well.

"It's going very well, yesterday was the best day I've had since I've been in business, and that's been 16 years," said Mona Martin, owner of the ID Building. "All of us are in our buildings, and people have been saying 'where are you?' Well, we're right here and doing great!"

For stores open on the mall, lighting in the evenings has been a problem, said Woolworth manager Ross Stevens.

"There's no lights on the mall yet and at night it gets dark about 5 o'clock, so everybody goes home," he said. The front of Woolworth's is still boarded up, making passersby do double-takes to see if the store is actually open.

Even the owner of the Original Pretzel/Hot Dog Cart in front of Woolworth's is doing big business.

"It was astronomical, it was relentless, we were caught flat-footed!" said Emory, who asked that her last name be withheld. "We did four times what we've done in the past on our busy days. This is a record that will stand for years, and most of the merchants I've talked to have said the same thing."

So far, business hasn't let up, according to Rodney Hoffer, owner of Santa Cruz Hardware.

"It's looking stronger today than it was yesterday," Hoffer said Saturday.

Storm/ More rain likely today

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This weekend's rain was the first since Oct. 24, according to Santa Cruz weather observer Ron MacDonald. The unseasonable dry spell, combined with weeks of unusually high temperatures, has left some people wondering if the ongoing three-year drought will be hanging around for a fourth year.

"I feel sorry for the people with damaged roofs and chimneys," said Zayante Fire Chief Ken Boynton. "But we need this rain. If we don't get enough rain this year, this county's going to dry up and blow away."

Rain is expected to spread as far south as the Tehachapi Mountains by early today, according to the National Weather Service.

"Maximum rainfall accumulations of 2 to 3 inches are possible by

midday, primarily over northwest California and the northern mountains," the service said in a statement.

The strong winds capsized a 24-foot sailboat in San Francisco Bay Saturday afternoon, the Coast Guard said.

The four sailors aboard the vessel were in the water for about ten minutes before they were picked up and brought to the Berkeley Marina, according to Lt. Jim Wierzbicki.

The snow level lowered to around 3,000 feet Saturday morning over the valleys north of Mt. Shasta at around 5,000 feet in the central Sierra Nevada along I-80.

Saturday's storm appeared to blow in and out again quickly, dumping large amounts of rain in a short amount of time. In Santa Cruz, .94 inches of rain fell between

4:30 and 9 p.m., MacDonald said. The total rainfall from the storm amounted to .98 inches, he said.

The local rainfall measurements listed below were tabulated at 6 p.m. Saturday, but significant amounts of rain fell after the measurements were taken.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Area rainfall reports for 24 hours ending at 6 p.m. Saturday and including the season's totals (since July 1) and those of last year at this time, are as follows:

	48 hr.	Sea.	'87 to date
Aptos	.35	2.93	3.92
Bonny Doon	1.92	7.76	11.15
Boulder Creek	1.70	7.33	na
Capitola	.39	3.48	6.32
Happy Valley	1	na	na
Soquel	.46	3.05	na
Scotts Valley	1.31	7.34	7.76
Swanton	1.29	4.81	6.61
Watsonville	.47	2.35	2.59

na — not available