

Earthquakes 10 yrs. later

Good Times 10-14-98

What Went Down, Downtown

by Richie Begin

FIVE P.M. WAS QUITTING TIME ON Oct. 17, 1989. Folks leaving the office, having coffee, thinking about the Giants' chances in the World Series just getting under way at Candlestick Park. Five minutes later, a lot of people were thinking about a new downtown. The old one was history.

It's 1999, and we're still thinking about a new downtown. Santa Cruz, you see, didn't exactly leap back to the old drawing board. Like a boxer who has been delivered a life-examining punch, Santa Cruz wandered around the ring, dazed and confused, for what seemed like an awfully long time. Watsonville bounced back, other communities picked up and carried on somehow.

Downtown Santa Cruz has just, in the last few years, started to reclaim its identity. The finishing touches are even now being put on some major holes in the downtown fabric. Refocusing a city and gaining the trust of businesses and consumers has been a long, hard road for merchants and property owners as they have awaited the revitalization of a downtown that has come in slow spurts over the last 10 years.

Let's take a walk. There's no shortage of good news on Pacific Avenue.

The Cooper House is a good place to start. Construction is winding up on what many residents consider a key downtown office and retail structure. Across the street, where Leask's Department Store used to be, Signature's Santa Cruz Cinema 9, with a wrap-around block of new local businesses, has been a tantalizing incentive for what is possible.

Turning the old City Jail into the new \$8 million Art and History Museum wasn't easy. Perhaps the earthquake helped a bit.

But the small brick Octagon History Museum hung tough. It's now The Museum Store.



DAVID ALEXANDER

Volunteers constructed pavilions for earthquake-ravaged businesses downtown.

The Melrose family also hung in there. Their building across Pacific now houses Paper Vision, a used-clothing shop, the Downtown Association offices and a small computer operation.

The huge Trust Building at Pacific and Lincoln is nearing completion. The massive parking garage to the rear still has a few months to go. It should be done by Christmas. Matt Farrell of the City Public Works Department recalls, "That old Trust Building, though damaged by the quake, finally had to be torn down because of fires that raged inside it. It probably could have been saved structurally, but the decision was made to raze and rebuild."

Not many recall that the first major building to appear following the quake was John Livingston's Logos building, a three-story affair designed by architect Michael Holden. It sits just

across from (the now-defunct) Cat 'n' Canary and the El Centro Mercado, two later additions that pegged that whole block.

The corner building at Cathcart and Pacific (remember Ford's Department Store?) is now the new University Town Center, designed by Thatcher & Thompson and owned by Barry Swenson. When it opens later this year, it will mark the University of California's first downtown appearance, as much of the space will provide off-campus housing and offices leased by the UC Extension.

Every building has a story. Does anyone remember the trick of trying to reconstruct the Ferrari building, now Rosie McCann's, without damaging its neighbors?

How about the remodeling of the old St. George Hotel and linking it to the County Bank

redo? How about three cheers for Zoccoli's Deli, which anticipated it all and served sandwiches throughout the melee?

Oh yes, we have a downtown, but unlike other downtowns, ours has a story you want to tell over and over again.

The Miracle of the Tents

Perhaps the brightest spot in the downtown revitalization occurred a couple of days after the earthquake.

As 36 members of Vision Santa Cruz got together to revision the future, a few local business folk, among them William Rubel (Stone Soup), Harriet Deck (Schooner Realty) and Matt Farrell (City Public Works), started talking to local businesses and quickly realized that if most of the business weren't open by the day after Thanksgiving, they'd be out of business for good.

A small miracle ensued.

With the urging of William Rubel, a local artist, the Phoenix Partnership, a nonprofit formed by the triad of the Santa Cruz Chamber, the Downtown Association and the Cultural Council, was hastily formed.

"I remember attorney Marsha Shandley drew up the papers," says Deck, who was instrumental in the leasing agreements. "I remember that a Canadian firm that made huge portable tents was contacted. John Butel got local unions to volunteer man-hours to put them up. We started negotiating leases for tenants, figuring out square footages and, presto, in less than a month, 50 businesses in 6-1/2 tents were up and running. By Thanksgiving, registers were ringing and we had a reason to be thankful. Some of the businesses were rescued in those days and others got their starts. It was quite a feat."