

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Santa Cruz area CofC moves after 46 years

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SANTA CRUZ — The Civic Auditorium has been home to the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce ever since the auditorium was built in 1939 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Federal Works Program.

Now, after 46 years of residency at the Civic, the chamber is moving to new and bigger second-story offices above County Bank at the corner of the Pacific Garden Mall and Cooper Street.

Moving vans were stationed outside the Civic early Friday morning. Bronze plaques and gavels were taken from the walls and transported to their new perches above the Mall.

Chamber Manager Lionel Stoloff and his wife, Bernice, a chamber staff member, were busy organizing and moving boxes of stuff.

"It's strange moving out of here," Stoloff remarked with nostalgia in his voice, as he scanned the disarray in the dismantled offices at the Civic. Sixteen years have passed since Stoloff first started working for the chamber as a volunteer.

"I've looked upon this as the home of the chamber," he said.

The county Convention and Visitors Bureau has also moved from the Civic. The CVB used to be part of the chamber until the two organizations split eight years ago.

New offices for the CVB are in Cooper Street Plaza at Front and Cooper Streets, Suite 350.

Earlier this week, the City Council terminated the leases at the Civic.

The city needs the space, say city officials.

And Stoloff says the chamber needs more space than the Civic can provide. The new offices have 1,000-square-feet.

Actually, the chamber is returning to its roots.

During the 1890s, when the

Chamber was known as the Santa Cruz Board of Trade, meetings were held at County Bank, said outgoing Chamber President Johna Vanderpool.

In the early 1900s the Chamber had second-story offices on Pacific Avenue at Lincoln Street. The organization was incorporated in 1920.

The Chamber's oldest living past president is Fred McPherson Jr., who served as the eleventh president in 1933-34.

Vanderpool said the chamber had been instrumental in securing federal funds to build the Civic Auditorium.

The CVB grew from an organization called the Advancemen, a group of businessmen with trademark red jackets, who traveled voluntarily around the state to make ties between Santa Cruz and other communities, Stoloff said.

Chamber members made the decision to separate from the CVB about the same time the motel room tax — called the transient occupancy tax — started to bring in more revenues.

Chamber members decided to break financial ties with the city to become politically independent, Stoloff said. "How can you bang on the city if you're getting money from it?"

Also, at that time it was thought — in the long run — the CVB could ask for part of the transient occupancy tax if it were not part of the chamber, Stoloff said. Today, the CVB is funded with those tax revenues.

Stoloff noted the Santa Cruz chamber is one of about 40 in the state — out of more than 600 California Chambers — that is accredited by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Chamber staff members plan to open in the new offices on Monday.

"It's going to take some getting used to," Stoloff added.