

Mall search continues; four cited

By JOHN ROBINSON
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SANTA CRUZ — Police were still searching this morning for the body of woman believed buried in rubble of the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company on the Pacific Garden Mall. No other victims are believed to be trapped in downtown buildings.

Two people were killed on the mall when they were trapped in collapsing buildings during Tuesday's 7.0 earthquake. There were identified as Catherine Treimain, a 75-year-old Ford's department store employee who was killed when the store's roof collapsed; and Sean McCormick, 21, whose body was found under a collapsed brick wall the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company at the north end of the mall.

Police and rescue teams with dogs and sophisticated listening equipment combed through every building on the mall Tuesday and Wednesday in search of more victims.

Rescue efforts centered on the coffee-roasting company where police said an employee identified as Robin Ortiz, 22, is believed to be buried under more than 20 tons of brick rubble.

Earthquake-rescue experts, including Southern California teams that worked in the recent Mexico City earthquake, have examined the rubble and have said there is no chance that the woman is alive.

"If the bricks came down in chunks, they say there could have been a chance (Ortiz is alive) but

the bricks came down individually," Santa Cruz Police Sgt. Joe Haebe said.

According to co-workers, the woman was in an upstairs office in the turn-of-the-century brick building when the quake struck. The upper floors of the building collapsed, burying at least two people, including McCormick.

Shortly after the quake, police dug through the rubble with their batons to get to the people. They rescued a woman who was partially buried under the bricks and a piece of sheet metal, and recovered the body of McCormick, reportedly an owner of the business.

Police and rescue teams were unable to uncover the rubble where Ortiz is believed to be buried. Haebe said that if the body is there, it is under a pile of bricks six-feet deep by 15 by 15 feet.

Crews had been removing the bricks by wheel barrow until they were ordered out of the building as more walls threatened to collapse. Looming over the crews is another 40-foot wall of bricks shored up with makeshift beams.

The stopping of the recovery effort outraged a group of people who said they were co-workers and friends of the victims.

The people exhorted police to let them enter the rubble to try to find Ortiz whom they believed might still be alive.

Frustrations boiled over about 6 p.m. Wednesday night when a group of chanting people descended upon the police command post at Cathcart Street and Pacific Avenue. Four of the people, chanting

"Don't stop the digging," and "Free Robin," crossed through police barricades and were stopped.

As the crowd threatened to advance on the mall, police called for reinforcements and a half-dozen police cars screamed through town to block off the protesters. A line of more than 30 police officers sealed off the street.

The confrontation brought media crews running. Bright television camera lights illuminated the crowd and police faces as they filmed the confrontation and recorded anyone who cared to yell out comments.

The emotional group disbanded, and later held an all-night candlelight vigil outside the police

lines at the coffee-roasting company.

"We just want them to keep digging. She could be alive under there!" one woman pleaded to police.

Four people arrested for crossing police lines were later cited and released.

This morning, engineers were examining the surrounding walls and deciding how best to continue the recovery effort. Some of Ortiz' relatives were parked in a pick-up truck behind police lines to keep them away from the media.

The back wall of Cafe Zhino, which shared a wall with the coffee company, was cracking and rescuers said it might fall, which

would further hamper efforts.

Nearly a 40-foot-high section of bricks had fallen on the coffee-roasting company area. The mortar between the bricks was so soft that rescuers could pull bricks free with their hands.

Shortly after the quake hit Tuesday afternoon, police went room to room through the Palomar and St. George hotels, kicking in doors to make sure that no one was inside. They pulled out a few frightened people who tried to hide inside the rooms.

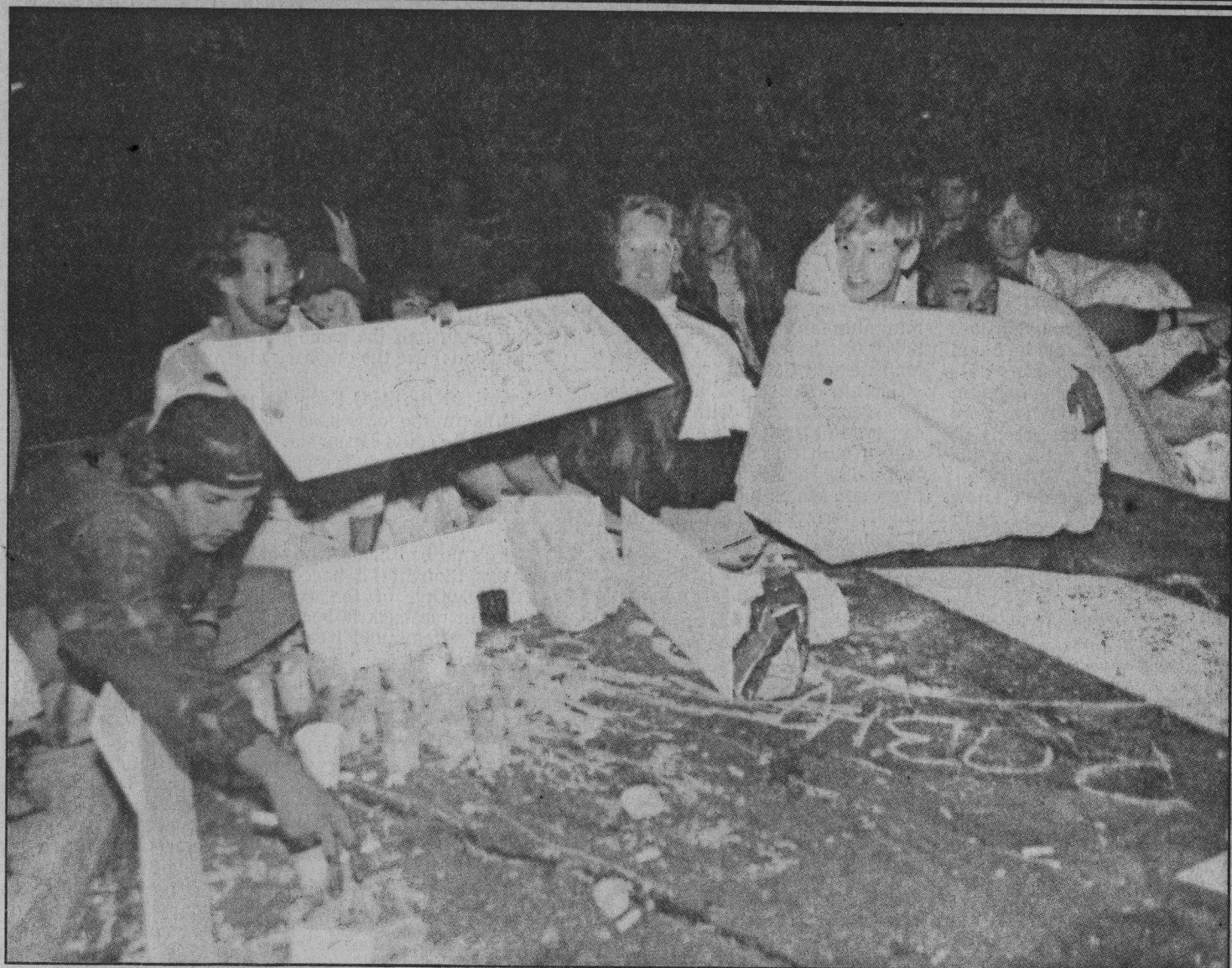
Wednesday afternoon, dog teams from as far away as Alaska were going through buildings. All of the buildings where people might be buried were checked at least four

times by dog teams. Rescue teams tried to find victims by using listening devices developed by the Israeli military.

Police described the inside of mall buildings as being a frightening mess of cracked and collapsed walls and ceilings.

Inside the Cooper House, police said, the main marble stairway had been pulled completely free of the floor on both ends and huge cracks run the length of the walls. Rubble and wreckage fill the floors.

Nearly all of the mall buildings are severely damaged, and extremely perilous for rescue crews. All through the night, police on the mall reported hearing brick and stonework collapsing.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

People had an all-night vigil Wednesday for Robin Ortiz, believed to be trapped at the Coffee Roasting Company