

Local

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EQ - Watsonville

National Red Cross chief visits, with check in hand



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George Moody

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The first check to a Watsonville agency from the Red Cross' multi-million-dollar special earthquake-relief fund was handed yesterday to Ruben Chavez, the chairman of the board of Salud Para La Gente, by George Moody, national chairman of the Red Cross.

Moody told Chavez the check, for \$50,000, would be the first of five such checks.

Salud Para La Gente has been promised \$250,000 by the American Red Cross to fund a social services program, a mental health program and a community disaster-preparedness program. The clinic has matching funds for each of the programs.

Salud's executive director, Barbara Garcia, told Moody about the partnership the clinic has formed with the local chapter of the Red Cross. In an attempt

to avoid the types of problems the mostly white, non-Spanish speaking Red Cross volunteers ran into when dealing with Latino earthquake victims, clinic workers will take Red Cross training classes, work on educating the community about what the agency does, and encourage Latinos to become Red Cross workers and donate blood. Garcia said that Salud has encouraged other community clinics in the state and throughout the country to do the same.

"We have to lean on each other for what each does best. We can feed people... once we know what the right food is," Moody said, getting a few laughs. Moody was making reference to the fact that after the quake volunteers were passing out bagels and cream cheese to people who rarely ate such foods. Disaster workers generally agree that people dealing with stressful situations should be fed foods they are used

to eating.

Earlier, Moody had met with Assistant City Manager Chuck Comstock, Fire Chief Gary Smith, Councilman Parr Eves and several local Red Cross officials to get an update on local Red Cross activities.

Smith said about 40 families who were living in motels or other facilities, many of whom had received rental-assistance checks from FEMA but were now running out of money, were in need of help. The Salvation Army has indicated that it wants to provide housing for people whose temporary housing help runs out before permanent solutions are found, he said, and it is in need of support.

Smith and other members mentioned some of the work the chapter is doing on cultural awareness.

He also said that a shelter that was set up at the Veterans Hall

downtown has still not been reimbursed for the \$7,000 it spent immediately after the earthquake, because Red Cross officials weren't satisfied with the accounting. Smith said that the local chapter had decided it would pick up the cost if the national Red Cross decided not to.

Moody said that he would check into the matter, and said that he welcomed hearing about those types of problems. He said the national Red Cross is taking an overall look at how services are delivered and may set up a whole separate disaster-operation section that can be more responsive to disaster needs.

Moody said that the Red Cross was looking at ways to make sure that each chapter learned from the experiences of the next. What happened at Callaghan Park, where earthquake victims set up an unofficial tent city near their homes and refused to move was

a painful, difficult experience which should "serve as an understudy" for other situations where the Red Cross is dealing with a largely Latino population, he said.

He said that the Oct. 17 earthquake had forced the agency to do a number of things differently.

Comstock, who was told that installments on the \$1.6 million the city is to receive from the Red Cross to help pay for low-income housing was on the way, told Moody that the money was "going to help make someone's dream come true."

Late last week, the Red Cross presented a \$87,359.28 check to the Community Action Board for the continued operation of the motel-voucher program. The check was the first monthly contribution to the program, to which Red Cross has promised up to \$600,000.