

# Weekend report

# Not by choice



Francisco Ruiz shares this plywood cubicle with another homeless man in the arts and crafts building.

# Quake's homeless learn to live together

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STAFF WRITER

**P** EOPLE SHARING private living space often complain about late-night noise, child-care duties and roommates hogging telephone lines and using all the hot water.

Homeless earthquake victims staying at the Red Cross shelter at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds are no different. A list of problems compiled by residents earlier this week showed similar complaints.

Since early this week, 225 people have lived in the three main fair buildings clustered on grounds usually used by those in pursuit of recreation.

The J.J. Crosetti Expo Hall, where fair visitors swarm annually to view home arts displays, has been designated as sleeping quarters for families. Each household's space, barely large enough to contain the narrow cots in them, has been partitioned off with plywood. Blankets strewn across the openings provide occupants with privacy. Except for the occasional religious photograph or altar adorning a wall shelf, personal belongings are not visible to passers-by.

Single men are housed in a similar fashion in the arts and crafts building.

Juan Gaitan, who is staying at the shelter, says the arrangement makes it difficult to get a sound sleep when people shuffle around at all hours of the night

and morning. His living unit joins the foyer of the arts and crafts building, a favored nighttime gathering spot for teenagers, and Gaitan said conversations intrude on his sleep.

A strawberry picker when the crop is in season, Gaitan is only needed by his boss for odd chores a few hours a day. Most mornings he misses breakfast, served from 6:30 to 8 a.m., because he hasn't risen in time.

He owns no car and has been

## Photos by Kurt Ellison

told he can't return to his earthquake-damaged apartment, which slipped off its foundation.

What hope does Gaitan have for the future?

"Just the ones they give you here," he replied in his native Spanish.

In the last few weeks, the Harvest Building, which in the fortnight following the Oct. 17 earthquake served as sleeping, living and dining area for the residents, is now used as a multi-purpose room in which meals are served three times a day. Outside the main entrance, people form lines as they wait their turn at several donated telephones installed for their use. All calls within California made from the phones are free.

Food is a big deal at the shelter for residents, who form lines well in advance of mealtime, and

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for food-service workers and volunteers, too. Snacks, such as Fruit Loops, milk and other beverages, are available around the clock.

Thirteen hundred meals a day are prepared in kitchens on the grounds. Most of the food is served at the fairgrounds. Some meals are delivered to Callaghan Park, site of an unofficial tent village, and others are taken to the National Guard Armory, where the Red Cross is serving 60 people.

When preparing pozole, or hominy grits, mass-feeding coordinator Ginger Lengenfelder cooked 60 gallons of it. A Reno resident, Lengenfelder said she is learning to cook Mexican food although she already thought she knew how.

"I knew how to fix Taco Bell food," Lengenfelder said.

To feed the primarily Hispanic clientele staying at the fairgrounds, she often clears out local store shelves of products such as chorizo.

Being a novice on the Mexican culinary scene, Lengenfelder admits to having blown it on a few occasions. Thinking pan dulce (sweet bread) was a dessert, she ordered 100 dozen bags of the item, normally served at breakfast in Mexican households.

Usually Lengenfelder is assisted in the kitchen by about 15 people, including California Conservation Corps members. However, because her CCC representatives are to be reassigned this week, she'll lose their services soon.



Guadalupe Gonzales, center, eats breakfast with her daughter, Amarelis, right, and Angela Perez.

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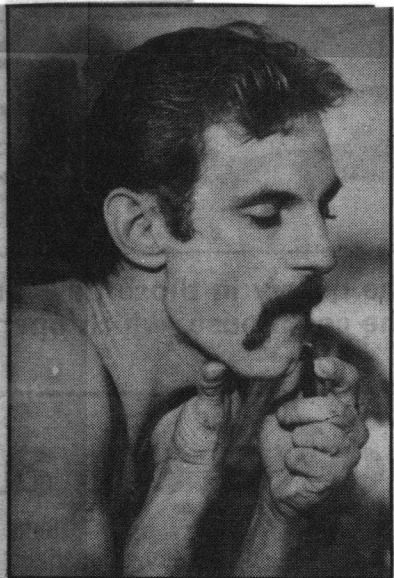
The Red Cross has about 100 volunteers who work different shifts at the fairgrounds shelter. In Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties, the Red Cross has spent \$1.6 million since the earthquake. The lion's share has been spent in Santa Cruz County, most of that in Watsonville, Dallis Pierson, a Red Cross spokesman said.

Security is tight as private guards and volunteers patrol the main buildings, parking lots and fairgrounds.

From all sleeping quarters, including tents set up on the grass fields, most residents must hike some distance to bathrooms, the portable showers set up in the parking lots, the nursing station, and other services.

One tent is occupied by 10 gang members, who Red Cross staff say are considered model residents.

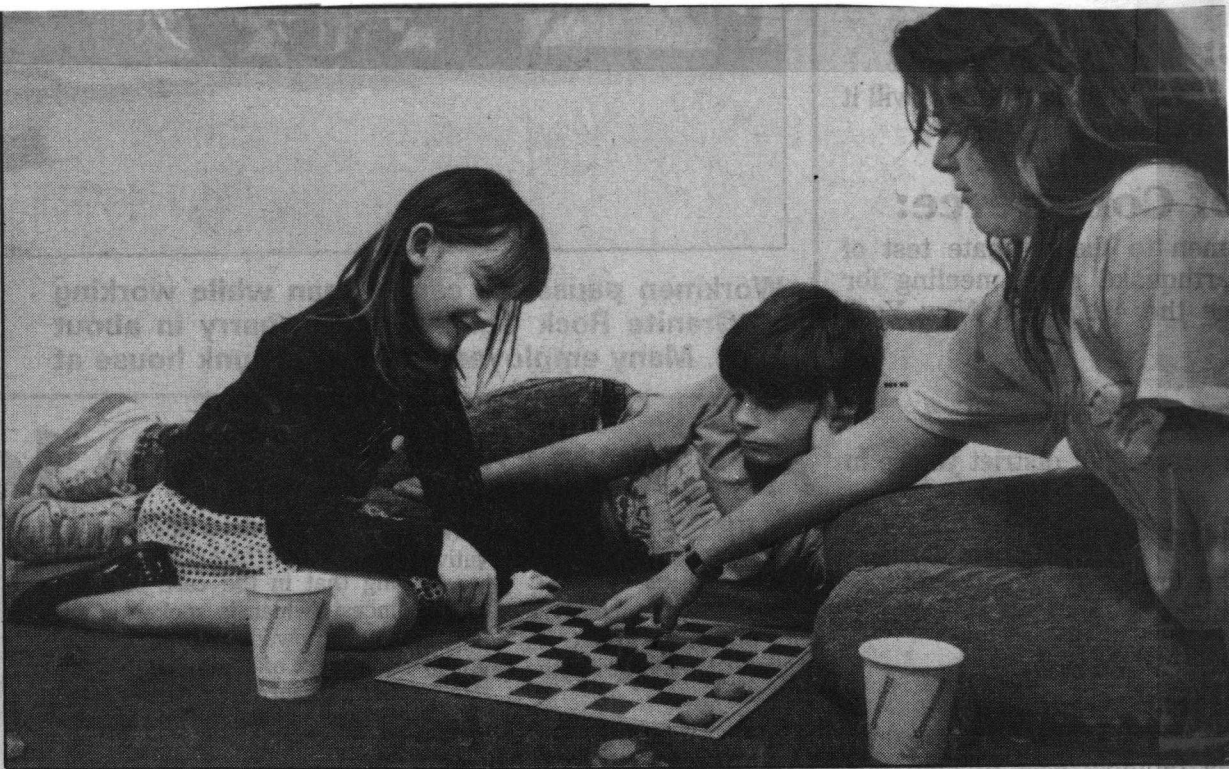
"Toro," a City Hall gang mem



**Mike Bartolomeo shaves outside at the fairgrounds; his Lincoln Street home was too damaged to live in.**

ber who identified himself only by his nickname said, "We don't want to fight because this is the only place we have to live right now."

Toro and his colleagues said they were concerned about some gang graffiti that appeared in the men's restrooms, which they

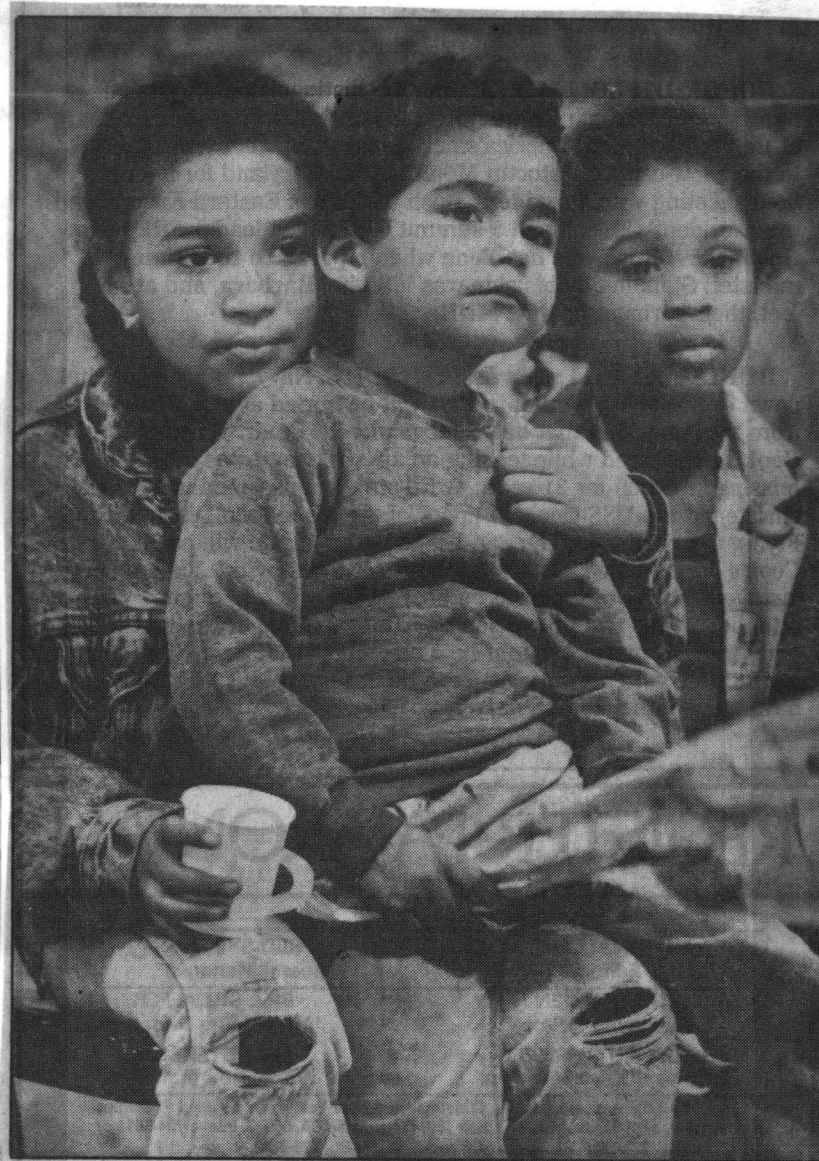


**Eight-year-old Stacey Marini, left, visits friends Aaron Hill, 11, and Shannon Hill, 13, at the shelter.**

suspect was scribbled by younger boys who want to be gang members.

Because even their young admirers refuse to tattle, Toro said City Hallers have been unable to track down the culprits. But since gang members want no trouble, they fear being blamed for the

act. In the front entrance of the Harvest Building, a bulletin board lists the times school buses make their stops outside the gates, the times for mass and meals, personal messages and other information. Off to one corner, a small photograph of Jesus is taped to the wall.



**From left, Kimico Baxter, 9, Cubby Kobow, 4, and Nicole Baxter, 7, watch TV in the Harvest Building.**

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