

Census shows Watsonville's diversity

By STEVE SHENDER
and BUD O'BRIEN

If a sketch were drawn of a "typical" Watsonville resident, based on statistics compiled by census takers in 1980, odds are that the picture would be that of a non-white woman under 35 years of age.

Slightly more than half the city's population (51.9 percent) is female, and 55.8 percent are "non-white," according to 1980 census figures.

"Whites," according to the figures, now account for 44.2 percent of the city's population (set at 23,543 by census-takers), while "minorities" now make up the majority of the city's population. The census figures confirm something that any casual observer might suppose: Watsonville's minority population is predominantly Hispanic in origin.

Hispanics, according to the figures, accounted for 48.9 percent of the city's population in 1980, when census-takers counted a total of 11,509 Hispanics — 10,800 of them of Mexican descent — living here.

The city, with 12.5 percent of the county's total population, claimed 41 percent of all persons of Hispanic origin in Santa Cruz County. Nearly 52 percent of all the county's Hispanic-origin residents resided in the Watsonville-Freedom area as of 1980. Watsonville and Freedom combined accounted for about 16 percent of the county's total population, according to census figures.

Slightly more than half (52.1 percent) of the city's residents were under 35 at the time of the census, indicating a population somewhat older than that of the county at large, where the comparable figure was 58.7 percent. But Watsonville was significantly ahead of the county in proportionate numbers of pre-school and school-age children. At the time of the census, 29 percent of the city's population was under 18, compared to 24 percent of the total county population.

In Freedom, the proportion of school-age and pre-school children was even higher. Children under 18 accounted for 33 percent of the

unincorporated community's population (which stood at 6,416 in 1980.) According to the figures, 63 percent of Freedom residents were under 35 at the time of the census.

Proportionately, Watsonville has more elderly residents than the county as a whole, while its unincorporated neighbor to the north has fewer, census figures indicate. Slightly more than 16 percent of the city's residents were over age 65 as of 1980, compared to 10 percent of the population of Freedom and 13.2 percent of county residents.

Watsonville, census figures indicate, grew at a faster rate than the county as a whole during the 1970's. At a time when the county's overall population was expanding by 52 percent, the city's population grew nearly 60 percent. (Growth figures for Freedom are not available.)

Households in both Watsonville and Freedom tend to be larger than in the county as a whole, according to census figures. Census takers counted 2.83 persons per household in the city in 1980

and 3.24 persons per household in Freedom. The comparable figure for the county was 2.54.

Not surprisingly, in view of those figures, both Freedom and Watsonville were found by census officials to be in more dire straits than the county at large where overcrowded housing was concerned.

The census defines as overcrowded any housing unit with more than one person per room. In the county as a whole census-takers counted 4,297 such "overcrowded" dwelling units, or 5.4 percent of the county's total housing stock.

According to the census, nearly 60 percent of the county's overcrowded housing was located in Watsonville (1,383 units) and Freedom (339 units) in 1980. Census takers classified 15 percent of the city's 8,651 year-round dwelling units and 16 percent of Freedom's 2,066 dwellings as overcrowded that year.

Half of the city's residences were owner-occupied dwellings as of 1980. Nearly 60 percent of all residences in Freedom were owner-occupied while 40 percent were rented.

Median home values were pegged by census-takers at \$71,000 in Watsonville and \$69,000 in Freedom in 1980. The comparable figure for the county that year was \$94,100, a third higher than the city's median home value.

The cities of Santa Cruz and Capitola, the census reveals, have become communities in which a majority of the residents are now renters, while the other incorporated city in the county — Scotts Valley — remains a haven for residents who own their own homes.

Santa Cruz, the county's governmental center and largest city, grew by 29.3 percent in the decade of the '70s to a city of 41,483

residents, 85.3 percent of whom are listed as "white." The next largest ethnic group is Hispanic, with 8.7 percent of the population.

The mean household size in Santa Cruz — where 52.1 percent of the residents are renters — is 2.3 persons, and, in a city that once was known as a "retirement" center, the percentage of those over 65 has shrunk to 14.3 percent. The median value of a house in Santa Cruz is \$90,300.

Capitola experienced a growth explosion of 79 percent during the decade and now has a population of 9,095, with only 43 percent of them owning their own homes. The ethnic mix: 89.4 percent white; .9 percent black; 2.3 percent Asian and 6.4 percent Hispanic. Median housing value is \$89,500.

The census report contained considerable information about other communities in the county as well, but it gave no comparative figures on the 1980 vs. 1970 census except for the incorporated cities.

A community-by-community rundown of some of the information:

LA SELVA BEACH

Population, 1,063. Percentage of population 65 and older, 10.5 percent. Ethnic mix: 89.2 percent white; .2 percent black; 1.9 percent Asian; 8.4 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 68.2. Median housing unit value: \$111,600.

APTOS

Population, 7,039. Percentage 65 and older, 13.7. Ethnic mix: 92.5 percent white; .3 percent black; 2 percent Asian; 4.4 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 65.6. Median housing unit value: \$106,300.

RIO DEL MAR

Population, 7,076. Percentage 65 and older: 11.4. Ethnic mix: 94.3 percent white; .2 percent black; 1.8 percent Asian; 3.2 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 70. Median housing unit value: \$135,200.

SOQUEL

Population, 6,212. Percentage 65 and older, 18.6. Ethnic mix: 91.6 percent white; .5 percent black; 2.5 percent Asian; 4.9 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 69.8. Median housing unit value: \$99,700.

LIVE OAK

Population, 11,482. Percentage 65 and older, 17.3. Ethnic mix: 87.7 percent white; .7 percent black; 2.7 percent Asian; 8.2 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 55.3. Median housing unit value: \$94,400.

OPAL CLIFFS

Population, 5,041. Percentage 65 and older, 21.2. Ethnic mix: 92.2 percent white; .3 percent black; 2.2 percent Asian; 5 percent Hispanic. Percentage of housing occupied by owners: 56.9. Median housing unit value: \$85,700.

This is the city



Aerial photo shows Watsonville and its growing fringe areas.