

VCF 1990 -

Cabrillo, city near accord on lease for post office

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STAFF WRITER FEB 17 1993

The Watsonville Center - Cabrillo College's South County satellite campus - may be getting a little more breathing room with its planned move into the old post office in downtown Watsonville.

Cabrillo representatives are close to reaching an agreement with Watsonville City officials - perhaps as early as the end of this week - to lease the two-story, 11,000-square-foot post office. Details of the agreement are still being decided, but architects for Cabrillo have drafted several renovation plans for the city-owned building at Trafton and Union streets.

Currently, Cabrillo leases space in La Manzana shopping center, where it has three classrooms and a computer lab that comprise about 4,500 square feet. That lease expires in July and Cabrillo has opted to look for a larger facility.

The center's move to a larger building is the first step in establishing a permanent satellite campus in downtown Watsonville. Having more space means the center will be able to offer more classes. And getting more students is pivotal to establishing a permanent campus.

To qualify for the state's new-school construction funds, community college satellite campuses must have a minimum of 500 full-time students, or about 2,000 part-time students.

This semester, about 900 students take classes at the center, about 60 percent of which are Latino. In 1987, when the center first opened, it had about 425 students, about 38 percent Latino. Cabrillo's overall Latino enrollment in 1987 was about 5 percent. This semester it has gone up to about 15 percent.

Rachel Mayo, director of the center, said Cabrillo hopes to have 2,000 students attending classes at the new facility within the next three years.

The center outgrew its present space several semesters ago, Mayo said.

"Right now everything is crunched up in one spot," she said.

About 40 courses are offered at the center this semester, but if it moves to the old post office next fall as planned, it will be able to offer about 60 courses, Mayo said. The center's budget this year is \$171,000, but next year it will go up to \$185,000.

The old post office - vacated in

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1991 when a new post office opened on Main Street a couple of blocks away - was brought by the City of Watsonville for \$425,000. The building has remained empty, waiting for a prospective customer. The city had planned to lease the property to a party interested in opening a restaurant in the building, but those plans fell through.

The old post office, Mayo said, would need to have an elevator installed to make it handicapped-accessible and the building's heating system may need to be overhauled. The cost of the lease, renovations and moving have yet to be determined, she said.

The old post office would also have offices for student services and faculty members and a larger area for the administrative staff.

The Watsonville Plaza is across the street from the old post office. The Plaza, Mayo said, could be used by students to stage musical events, plays or other activities. The Watsonville library is next door.

Mayo said moving the center to the post office building will be beneficial to downtown Watsonville.

"It will be a positive image for the downtown community," Mayo said.