

# A new downtown emerges

Six months after Main Street was eerily quiet, roped off to all but hard-hat wearing inspectors and demolition workers, many of the plans for the new downtown are being put together piece by piece, with some old projects from before the quake at the forefront.

Throughout the city, 120 commercial, industrial and public buildings were red-tagged after the quake, at an estimated cost of at least \$47 million; 131 were yellow-tagged, at an estimated cost of nearly \$3 million; and 1,049 others were usable, but needed at least \$1.6 million in repairs, according to city figures.

Downtown has been the focus of many people's attention as plans for rebuilding have progressed.

A sampling of plans includes:

- In the 200 block, the Postal Service plans to have a new post office built within less than a year.

- One block down Second Street, a new community center will be built in Marinovich Park. A non-profit Oakland group is building the center for free using donated materials and labor. A potential stumbling block - difficulty getting insurance - was dissolved last week when the group se-

cured coverage after a one-day all-out networking effort.

- In the 300 block, talks between a committee of people who want to buy the Fox Theater for community use, including Spanish-language movies and concerts or other arts events, are entering their fourth year. Former Mayor Ann Soldo said the owner, Hank Garcia, is making earthquake repairs while the talks continue.

- Also in the 300 block, property and business owners got together and hired an architect, Robert Corbit, to draw up potential plans for the entire block. The plans call for mixed residential and commercial usage. Stella Romo, one of the owners, said plans will become more concrete once the city council has begun evaluating recommendations for downtown redevelopment later this month.

- In the 400 block, construction work on the interior of the Lettunich Building has been nonstop since the quake, according to Marie Devery, one of its owners.

The heavy bank vaults that were part of Pacific Western Bank didn't budge during the shaking, which put pressure on the columns around them. The columns are being repaired, however, and the building could

be entirely ready to open in a few months, depending on who moves in, Devery said. She added that 80 offices upstairs are also open. King's Garden Restaurant on the lower level has also reopened.

- Also in the 400 block, Ford's Department Store is "looking at all the financing options for rebuilding," and is hoping to get some help from the Small Business Administration, according to Hal Hyde, Ford's senior vice president.

Ford's has moved several times since the quake demolished its 110,000 square-foot building. In its current 32,000 square-foot location off Main Street, it is waiting for city permits for re-opening the snack bar, beauty shop, and candy department.

Hyde said that sales have been normal proportional to the amount of space the store has had. It is just now, for the first time since the earthquake, getting in new shipments of fashions and other goods to replenish its inventory.

- At the other end of the main strip, St. Patrick's Church launched a nationwide campaign March 17 to raise rebuilding funds.

-Susanna Heckman