



Michael McCollum

Local muralist Guillermo Aranda offers a sneak peek at the Watsonville Transit Center's new mural Friday.

# Ticket to ride

*New transit center opens with unveiling of mural*

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WATSONVILLE — A colorful 150-foot-long mural featuring popular heroes and a drug- and alcohol-prevention theme is the finishing touch to the city's \$1.5 million transit center.

The mural was officially unveiled at the opening of the Watsonville Transit Center at West Lake Avenue and Rodriguez Street yesterday morning.

Dignitaries and a crowd of about 200 attended the 10:15 ceremony outside the 4,000-square-foot terminal building, which officials touted as both a business and transportation hub.

The "modern, up-to-date facility will offer new opportunities for transportation and enhance our local business," said City Councilman Oscar Rios, who is also chairman of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District.

He was one of several speakers who expressed hopes that the transit center could give Watsonville's downtown business economy a shot in the arm.

The long-awaited center in-



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City councilman Oscar Rios, left, and state Sen. Henry Mello, right, both made an appearance at the opening of the Watsonville Transit Center yesterday.

cludes bus service from both Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Greyhound bus riders, who have had to buy tickets on the bus since the

Greyhound station in Watsonville closed three years ago, will be able to buy tickets at the center.

A main terminal and six kiosks

— only one of which is completed — will host a variety of retail-

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ers, from a convenience mart to a taqueria.

Translating his comments into Spanish, Rios presented federal, state and local officials, including state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and Mayor Tony Campos.

"This unites the North County and South County and everything in between," Mello said.

Among the crowd were many of the 40 youths who worked with the youth-run Watsonville Community Partnership to create the mural.

"It came out more than we expected. It came out really nice," said Gaby Durante, 17, a Watsonville High School student. He was one of the group that has met with local muralist Guillermo Aranda for the past three months to brainstorm ideas, collect images, and finally paint the mural promoting alcohol- and drug-abuse prevention.

The mural's theme is "United by pride, dignity and knowledge, we heal." It aims to represent positive role models and features images of Cesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela and John F. Kennedy.

"We wanted to do all the cultures in Watsonville," Durante said.

Funding for the mural project came from a grant awarded to the Santa Cruz Office of Education by the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. The \$40,000 grant has already funded a prevention-themed mural on Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz and will pay for a third in the Beach Flats area of Santa Cruz.

Beatrice Lopez, a Cabrillo College student who began volunteering with the Partnership when she was a student at Watsonville High School, coordinated the mural project.

"It's really important to see members of the community from diverse backgrounds can come together on a prevention project such as this one," she said during the reception.

Delays plagued the transit project, which was scheduled for completion in the late 1980s until the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake dashed those plans. It ran into further complications when the original contractor on the project filed for bankruptcy.

Wallace Berry, an Aptos businessman, is the master tenant of the transit center. He has already leased space in the main terminal to Trans Mart, a convenience store, and is in negotiations to sign McDonald's and a check-cashing service.

A pizza stand and a coffee shop have already signed leases for kiosks, which are scheduled to be built in the next few weeks and opened in November. The owner of a taqueria has also expressed interest in a kiosk, Berry said.

Bus service at the new terminal began last week. Previously, buses stopped at a temporary terminal operating next to Grand Auto Supply on Rodriguez Street.

What remains to be seen is whether residents will use the bus service and retail outlets.

"You can have the buses running all over the place but if people don't ride them and park their cars, it doesn't matter," Mello said.