

# Dignitaries host Salomon send-off

By DIANE NOLAND

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — City Manager Steve Salomon is leaving Watsonville with a much steadier and stronger pulse after six years at the helm, his supporters say.

Thanked for his heartfelt leadership Sunday during a farewell reception at City Hall, Salomon returned the compliment to other city and organizational leaders, many of them present, saying that in spite of differing political views, they had found common ground and worked together for the benefit of Watsonville.

"That's made a difference. A lot of communities argue about everything and that hasn't happened here," Salomon said.

Downtown Watsonville was still struggling for survival from the Oct. 17, 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in November, 1990, when Salomon took on the job.

Fords department store — a



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Elias Alonzo (left) and Heidi Gottfried present Steve Salomon with a painting by Gottfried titled "El Corozon Valle de Pajaro" (The Heart of the Pajaro Valley) at a going-away celebration for Salomon on Sunday.

mainstay of Main Street — had been destroyed as well as many other buildings, and smaller businesses in the area were gasping for breath. Already in crisis from several plant closures, Watsonville needed a shot

in the arm, said former mayor Elizabeth Murphy, who was mayor from 1987 to 1989 and a member of the committee that hired Salomon.

"We went up to Albany (where Salomon was city administrator)," Murphy said. "The people on the council were crazy about him. They didn't want to let him go."

But Murphy and then-Councilmen Todd McFarren and Parr Eves were able to convince Salomon to come to Watsonville.

"You were the only one who wanted the job," joked Parr Eves. "Besides that (Salomon) bought our lunch."

Murphy said, that while she did not always agree with Salomon, she recognized the always-solid reasoning behind his decisions. With the city in crisis and earthquake relief money coming in through the efforts of Sen. Henry Mello, Salomon had a lot of managing to do, she said.

"Steve stayed close to Henry Mello...money was flowing in and he had to be sure it went to the right places," Murphy said. "He had all that to handle plus housing problems and people displaced."

Murphy credited Salomon with securing needed recreational facilities for young people, saying he

considered the large numbers of youth in Watsonville and pushed for them.

"You didn't have to sit down and write him a letter," she said. "He recognized the need."

City Clerk Lorraine Washington, who has worked closely with Salomon, said his people skills are a big part of his effectiveness.

"He knows what's needed partly because he's out in the community talking to people," Washington said. "He's not in his office all the time. He's out there."

Business developer Elias Alonzo, said he recognizes Salomon as one, who like himself wants to build bridges between Anglos and Latinos.

"The Latino population, if they haven't already, they should light a novina — that's a candle — for Steve Salomon," Alonzo said. "He has empowered so many of us."

Mentioning Carlos Palacios, who has been appointed interim city manager with Salomon's blessing, and other city staff, Alonzo said that Salomon has hired many Latinos, provided training and passed on valuable knowledge to them.

Palacios, who will take on the job as interim city manager on Dec. 9,

said that Salomon is leaving him with a "very good staff" and has encouraged him in many endeavors through the years they have worked together.

"In the true sense of the word, he has been a mentor to me," Palacios said.

Sister Susan Olson, executive director of Plaza Vigil El Pajaro Commercial Cultural Center, said her experience with Salomon was one of inclusion in decision-making.

"He included (people) in decision making and taught them how," Olson said. "He helped prepare people for this change."

John Hurd, president of Cabrillo College, also credited Salomon with the college's "growth and expansion" in Watsonville, saying that the move from the La Manzana Center in 1994, to the old Post Office building on Union Street to the upcoming expansion, is "due largely to Steve's vision."

"Early on, he very clearly saw the link between the future success and quality of life for the people of Watsonville to Cabrillo College," Hurd said. "This would have happened without Steve's leadership. He's leaving quite a legacy."