

# Latino Chamber CEO steps down

By DAVE BROOKS

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Luis De La Cruz has been relieved of his active duties as CEO of the Santa Cruz County Latino Chamber of Commerce.

Board chairman Roberto Garcia announced Friday De La Cruz was still employed by the Latino Chamber in an advisory role, but said that the four-person Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Latino Chamber would

## Board of directors is made up of inactive members

temporarily take over the duties of the CEO.

Just who sits on the executive committee is unclear. According to a recently published newsletter by the Latino Chamber, nine men and women, including Garcia, make up the board of directors. Five of those members said they have resigned from their positions, includ-

ing one member of the executive committee. Two other executive committee members were unavailable for comment.

Al Alcalá, a former Watsonville mayor and insurance salesman who recently relocated to Modesto, is listed as the treasurer for the executive committee. Alcalá said he resigned from his post more

than a year ago because he was never allowed access to chamber records.

Alcalá said that he had once recommended an outside audit of the Latino Chamber's finances but was told that it wasn't necessary.

"I never saw financial papers of any kind," he said. "I never did anything as the treasurer."

Abbie Romandia and Henry Joa said they also formally quit. Romandia said he resigned more than six months ago. Local financial advisor Sedric Cade is also listed as being on the board, but Cade said that he only served in an advisory role as a non-voting representative from the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and his term has long since expired.

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## CHAMBER

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"By default, I'm not technically a member," Cade said. "I haven't been to a meeting in more than a year."

Nelson Santiago is also listed as a board member but he moved to Mountain View more than a year ago and now works in East Palo Alto.

"It's hard to call me an active board member," he said.

On Sept. 10, the Latino Chamber was evicted from its office at Plaza Vigil in downtown Watsonville. Landlord Jack Deal said the chamber was several months behind on its \$160-a-month office and had failed to secure proper insurance.

The Seaside Company announced Tuesday it is suing the Latino Chamber for \$10,000. Officials at Seaside said the Latino Chamber had not paid for renting the Coconut Grove Banquet and Conference Center, owned by the Seaside Company, to host its annual 2001 Latino Chamber dinner.

Alcalá said the recent news has caught many members off guard.

"There is not a single board member, past or present, that is not shocked," he said. "We can't pay rent on a \$160 office? I saw (De La Cruz) two weeks ago and he didn't mention it. This kind of stuff doesn't fly. It's a tremendous disappointment."

Alcalá said that many of the board members had moved away but were never replaced with new members.

"At the last meeting that I attended, we had less than 50 percent of the people there," he said. "It seemed to me that the board was ineffective and (De La Cruz) would always run things."

Alcalá even tried to formally quit and sent De La Cruz written letters of resignation. Despite his efforts, Alcalá is still listed as the treasurer.

"I never gave him permission to put my name on that doggone newsletter," he said.

Mark Meyers is listed as the legal counsel to the board of directors but said his role is limited. Meyers said he was unaware of the Seaside Company lawsuit.

"I just provide some occasional pro bono advice to the group," he said.

Garcia said he was under the impression that all nine listed board members were still active and said that Friday's resignation announcements were "news to me." He said the Latino Chamber's finances were in good shape and added that he was interested in working with the public.

"We know that we have bank accounts and that they're active," Garcia said. "We also decided that we want to cooperate with the newspapers."

Messages left with listed board member Lou Tuosto went unanswered prior to press time. Contact information was unavailable for Martin Reyna, who is listed as the board's vice chairperson and is the past owner of the El Flamenco nightclub, and Mona Villalpando, who is listed as the board secretary.

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— Al Alcalá