

WATSONVILLE

Bersamin named mayor on 5-2 vote

mayors

By **DONNA JONES**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

12606

Manuel Bersamin spoke about unity and healing after a year of political strife in Watsonville.

But his selection as the city's new mayor Tuesday highlighted continuing divisions in the community.

Bersamin was appointed to the leadership post on a 5-2 vote just minutes after newly elected council members Greg Caput, Edward Din and Kimberly Petersen were sworn in.

Petersen, who won the District 4 seat previously held by Ana Ventura Phares in the Nov. 7, election, was selected mayor pro tem by a vote that split the same way.



BERSAMIN

The 5-2 votes represented alignments that developed during the election campaign, with Bersamin, Petersen and Councilmen Antonio Rivas and Oscar Rios forming the core of the majority.

"My message is that we get past the (vote) right away," said Bersamin. "The challenge will be to bring everybody together."

Councilman Dale Skillicorn also joined the majority when it became the clear the votes were there without him.



PETERSEN

"I can count to four," he said after the meeting. "We have to work together, whatever our political differences, in the interest of the community."

But Din and Caput voted against Bersamin, and then against Petersen, though she was the only candidate nominated for the second leadership post.

Earlier in the evening, Caput nominated Skillicorn for mayor, a motion that failed on a 4-3 split. He said he wanted to show his new constituents that he was independent.

"Up to the point of the vote, I am going to voice my opinions," Caput said, adding he'd support both Bersamin and Petersen now that they'd won.

Said Rios, "We will agree. We will disagree. And we'll see where the votes end."