

# Spring opening for Fox Theatre

By KEITH MURÀOKA  
Sentinel staff writer

16-17-91

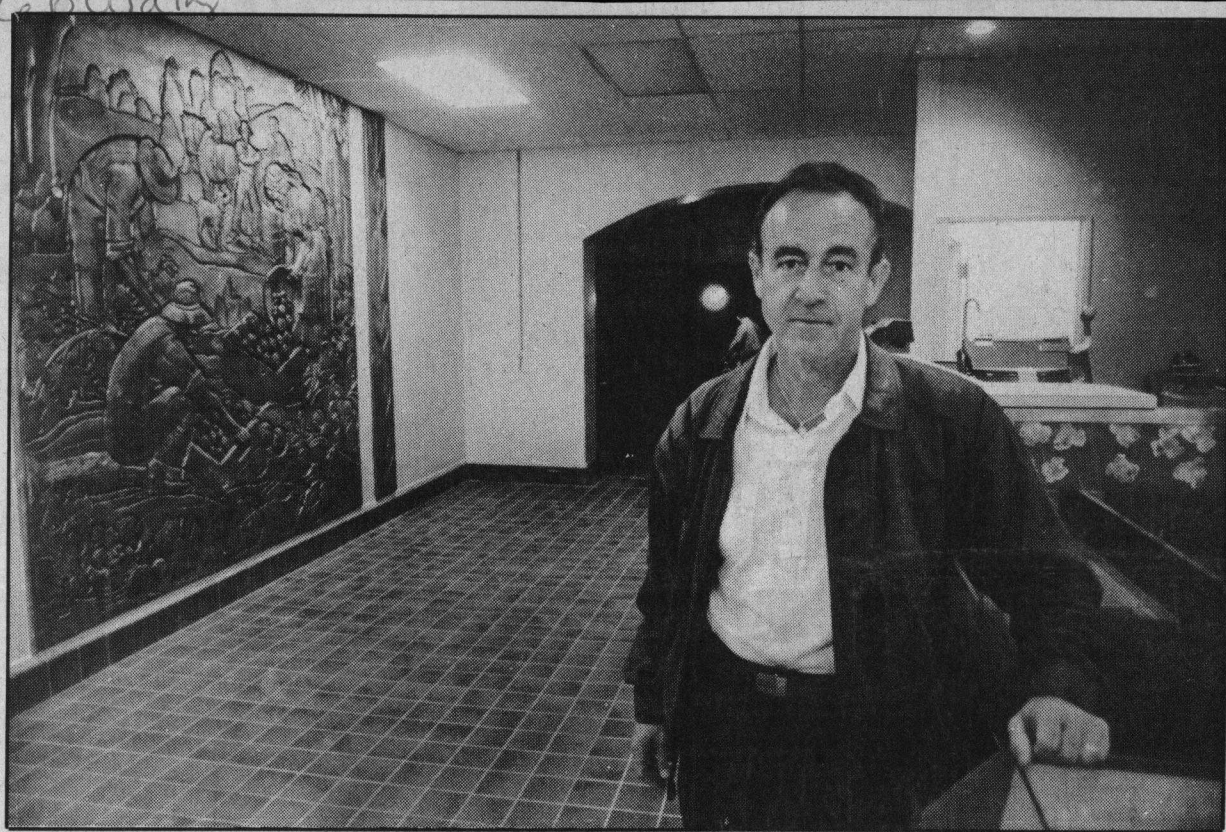
WATSONVILLE — The venerable Fox Theatre in downtown Watsonville, the largest theater in the county at 1,050 seats, has been closed since the earthquake.

But after more than \$100,000 in repairs, it will reopen in spring, complete with a redesigned lobby and 1,700 square feet of new commercial space. The theater will be part of Watsonville's downtown celebration at 3:15 p.m. today.

Owner Hank Garcia said he hopes to reopen the theater by March. He plans to return to showing primarily Spanish-speaking movies, and hopes to operate a restaurant with his son in the new commercial space.

Repairs have included replacing the rear wall of the theater, which was severely damaged when the adjacent Masonic Hall was demolished three months after the earthquake. The two establishments shared a common wall, and the demolition left a billboard-sized hole.

Besides the earthquake repair, Garcia installed new carpet and renovated the Main Street frontage. The lobby has been redesigned, with the theater entrance now off Maple Street.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Fox owner Hank Garcia plans to re-open the Watsonville theater in March.

"It's obviously taken us much longer than we thought," Garcia said. "You don't get \$100,000 by shaking trees. We had problems with lenders."

At the same time, Garcia said he was also delayed by off-and-on talks about possibly selling the theater for conversion into a performing arts center.

"That's one of the other reasons we didn't move forward on repairs right away," Garcia said. "We thought we had a better chance of

selling the theater to the city and Pajaro Valley Arts Council."

Those plans eventually fell through.

Garcia is optimistic that the renovated theater will again be successful. Built in 1923 in the days of silent movies, it was first called the El Pajaro Theater and then the California Theater before the Fox East Coast Theatre chain took over in 1931. Garcia bought it in 1972, and began catering to Watsonville's Latino residents.

However, he said he also plans to show some English-speaking movies as well.

Garcia has a back-up plan, too. That involves dividing the theater into a main auditorium of 758 seats and two smaller theaters of 111 seats and 137 seats upstairs.

"But I think we'll always be successful," Garcia added. "We've been successful before, and we have to remain positive. I'll be relieved and happy when we open again."