

Local news

✓ Food Banks Loaves and Fishes finds a new home

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WATSONVILLE — Big changes are afoot behind the scenes at two of the city's most influential not-for-profits.

Loaves and Fishes food pantry, the largest in the county in terms of pounds of food distributed, has been casting about for a new home for more than a year, ever since St. Patrick's Church gave the pantry a gentle nudge out the door. The church needs the space for its own programs, but allowed the pantry to take the time it needed to find a new space.

This week, Loaves and Fishes is negotiating with the YMCA to lease — and eventually buy — the home on Sudden Street that currently houses the Pajaro Valley Arts Council and Gallery. The pantry's board is launching a fund drive to raise the money for a \$50,000 down payment.

"There's an angel out there who has \$50,000 with our name on it," said

Aileen Madera-Correa, chairwoman of the Loaves and Fishes board. "My faith is that strong."

That, of course, means the art gallery — which is renting the building from the YMCA — will have to find new quarters, as well. Fortunately, that project is already in the works: the Pajaro Valley Arts Council is negotiating with the city to rent space on the lower floor of the city parking garage at Rodriguez and Beach streets. The spot is directly across the ornately landscaped Stroh's Alley from the old Pacific Bell building, which the city is hoping to procure and turn into a cultural arts and performance facility.

The food pantry, meanwhile, is hard at work conducting its winter food drive. Loaves and Fishes is distributor of more than 250,000 pounds of food from the Second Harvest Food Bank. The California Grey Bears of Santa Cruz runs the second largest pantry in the county, distributing some 177,000

pounds.

Madera-Correa said Loaves and Fishes, which is run entirely by a ¾-time director and the volunteer efforts of the board and other community members, is finally getting the recognition it deserves. For the first time this year, the Watsonville City Council funded the pantry with a \$1,500 grant.

Besides trying to raise money to fund the move, the group is conducting a Christmas food basket drive to serve about 100 families more than last year, for a total of 600. They are also looking for toys for each household. Anyone who wishes to donate toys, food or money should call the pantry at 722-4144 or 722-9888.

Meanwhile, arts supporters are excited about their pending move to the central downtown area, a proposal that is still in the negotiating stages. If it comes together, the two facilities will be adjacent: the Pajaro Valley Art Gallery in the first floor of the parking

garage, and the large cultural center that will house a variety of groups right next door.

The plan would provide a boost to downtown revitalization efforts while giving local arts and cultural groups critical support and an exciting synergy, said Jerry Hernandez of Main Street Watsonville. Among the groups involved are Main Street Watsonville, the Santa Cruz County Cultural Council, the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts, the Pajaro Valley Arts Council and numerous local performers and artists.

"We could be utilizing the arts to their best benefit for the economy," said Carol Trengove, vice president of the Pajaro Valley Arts Council board. "We pull a lot of people into the community when we have shows. Currently they come, they see their show, then they get in their car and drive away. If they were downtown, they would be more likely to stay, shop in the stores and eat in the restaurants."