

Grey Bears opens local office



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Ruth Schaffer, program coordinator for the California Grey Bears, works Thursday with instructor Carlos Estupinsan inside the newly opened California Grey Bears Watsonville office at 318 Main St.

Group's goal is to nearly double area food donations for seniors

By DAVID CARKHUFF
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The California Grey Bears plans to nearly double its food donations in the area, thanks to the opening of a permanent base of operations Thursday in downtown Watsonville.

The nonprofit group delivers 15-pound bags of fresh produce donated by local agriculture companies to feed shut-in and indigent seniors. The Grey Bears deliver more than 500 bags to seniors in Watsonville and another 300

to other residents of the South County on a weekly basis.

Now, the group has a base of operations at 318 Main St.

"We're going to reach 600 more people down here, that's what our goal is. ..." said Ed Martinez, business development director for California Grey Bears. "We feed 800 seniors a week down here, and we want to up that by another 600."

Office coordinator Ruth Schaffer will teach computer classes and offer

language courses, including English for Spanish speakers, to Grey Bears members.

Outreach and education are crucial, Schaffer said.

"Most of the people don't know anything about the delivering of bags and bread," she said.

Martinez agreed that many senior citizens shy away from the service

"We had to have a place where they

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could meet and feel safe," he said.

Volunteer Ann Malveaux of Watsonville said the Grey Bears food donations make an enormous difference.

"You only once have to have someone call and say, 'I didn't get my bag,' and you realize how important it is. ... You only have to answer one call like that, and you know it's important," she said.

Wells Fargo Bank and the City of Watsonville made space available at a monthly cost of only \$1.

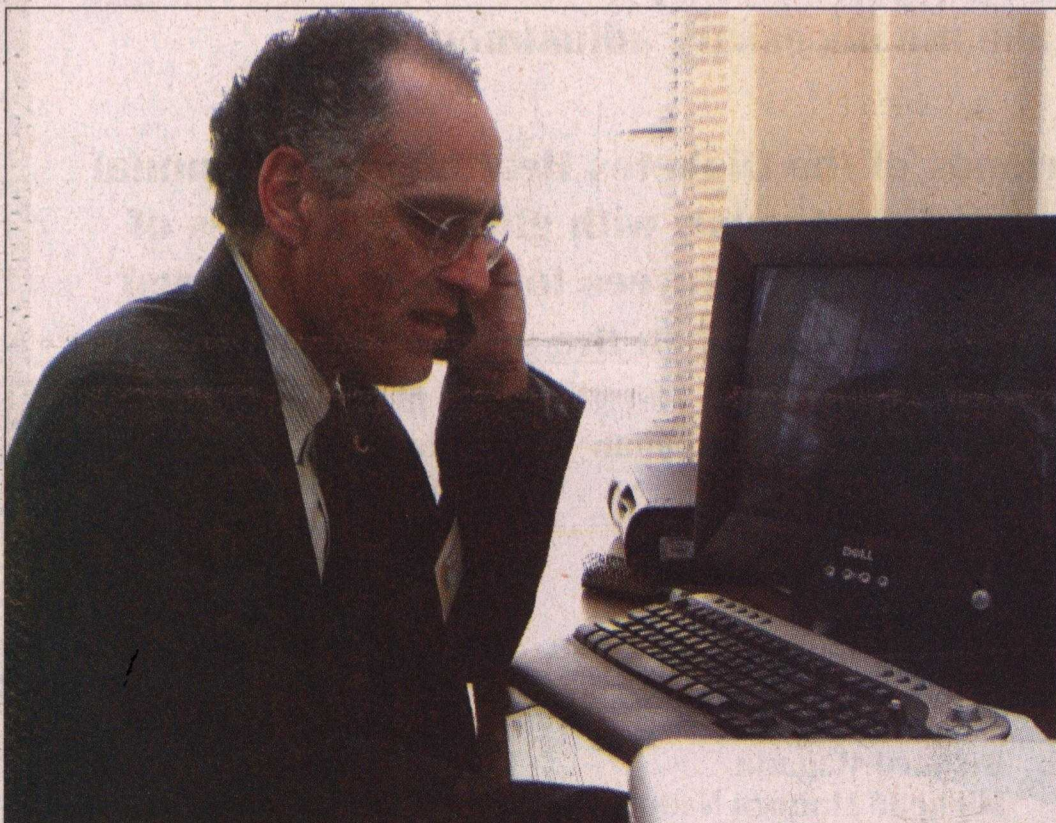
"The city had this property that was sitting empty, and between Wells Fargo and the city of Watsonville, they made these leases available to nonprofits at a very, very reasonable rate, and that was the only reason we could afford to do it," Martinez said.

After a ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Pajaro Valley

Chamber of Commerce Thursday, the Grey Bears settled into the local headquarters. The group shares a flat with Santa Cruz AIDS Project, CalWorks counseling, Center for Community Advocacy and the American Red Cross.

Using its warehouse in Santa Cruz, the organization handles 1.5 million pounds of food a year. The nonprofit group's slogan is "seniors helping seniors since 1973."

For information about the California Grey Bears, call 479-1055 or visit www.greybears.org.



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Ed Martinez, business development director for the California Grey Bears, tests a new computer station in the new downtown Watsonville location.