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**S**TUDENTS AT Watsonville Community School are there because they have a hard time following rules in a traditional high school. But for several weeks, they've towed the mark for the rigid routines of the National Guard and the American Red Cross.

The students, under the direction of counselor Jade Taylor, have volunteered hundreds of hours at the National Guard Armory shelter since the Oct. 17 earthquake left many Watsonville residents with no other place to live.

The young people do everything from manual labor to translating for nurses. During regular school hours, they earn credit for their work, but all of them can be found still helping out long after the last school bell of the day has sounded.

"I'm in a group home, and I don't like being there all the time," said Michael Maduro, 15. "I said go for it, because I could get out of the house. But I wanted to go help, too. It feels good to know you're helping."

Danny Fuentes, 16, had personal reasons for signing up. Some of his relatives were left homeless by the quake, and were living at the shelter.

"Their house fell to the ground," Fuentes, a 10th grader said. "I wanted to make sure they got what they needed."

Fuentes' family interests quickly spread to strangers. He found the need for volunteers so great he wound up staying overnight during weekends.

"I'd just call my mom and tell her I was too tired to come home. I'd just sleep there," Fuentes said. "I like working with the people. You know you're doing something great, you're doing something right."

Claudia Lopez, 16, had to get past her father's objections to volunteer.

"At first, he didn't want me out there at night," she said.

But he relented, and Lopez started volunteering after school helping non-English speaking residents talk with non-Spanish speaking staff. She also helped with intake forms, registration papers and other duties.

"I'd help wherever they needed it," she said. "I would work after school until like, 9 (p.m.) then go home."

Population at the armory has fluctuated, and with it, the need for volunteer help has dwindled, then risen. The community high school volunteers have steadily helped, and say they've developed an ability to work within a structured system that isn't al-



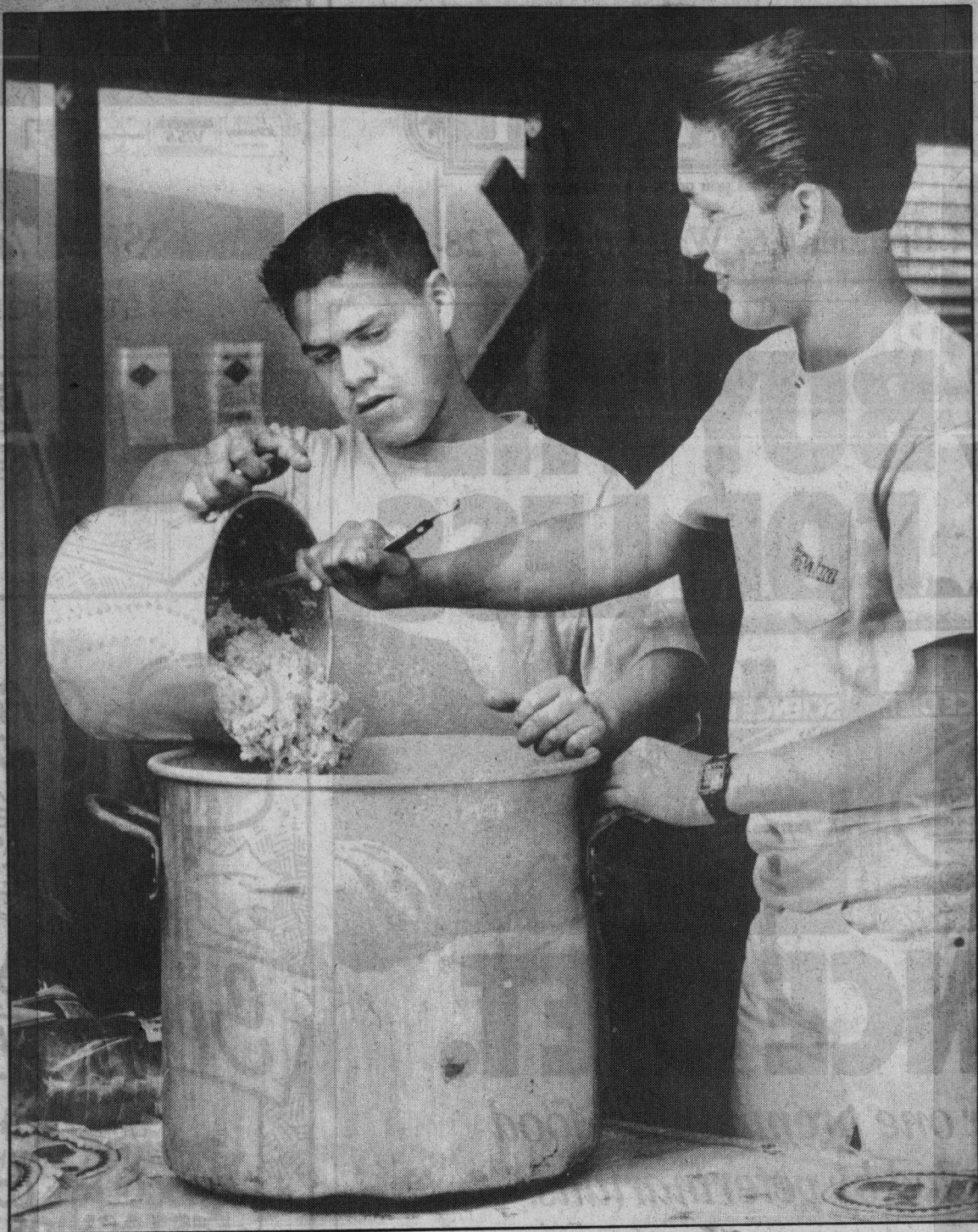
Kurt Ellison

Student volunteer Claudia Lopez, left, chats with shelter resident Maria Luz Rojas and daughter Sandra.

# Teens give help, get satisfaction

REFERENCE

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Kurt Ellison

## Left, Danny Fuentes and Michael Maduro, help with breakfast clean-up.

ways as organized as it looks.

All of the teens were given conflicting orders by various personnel, they said. One time, Maduro was told by one official to move bottles of water to another side of the room, and leave empty ones where they were. The man had no sooner left the room when another official told Maduro to move all of the bottles.

Lopez said it was the same with office duties — she'd get opposite instruction from two or more staff. Like Maduro and Fuentes, she tried to decide the simplest and best procedure for each task, and made decisions on her own.

"In the beginning they'd tell you once, and then they'd take off," Maduro said.

"You'd have to figure a lot out for yourself," Lopez said. "But they wanted you to do it per-

fectly. At first, I would get really nervous that I'd made mistakes. I'd think, 'Oh my God, what have I done now?'"

The students were supervised by National Guardsmen and say they developed a good relationship with the men. The military staff, they say, treated them like they were valued, but put a good deal of responsibility on them at the same time.

"They were treated as adults," said counselor Taylor. "They had to come through."

Fuentes put it another way: "They said they couldn't promise you much (for volunteering). They 'ain't going to kiss your ass."

The students also saw real-life dynamics at work in the shelters. They said the smarter residents — the ones who knew how to con people — always got the lion's share of the offerings.

"Damn," said Lopez. "Some of these people take advantage."

But they were in the minority, students said. Some of the people showed their appreciation in words, but many chose action. The bathrooms were continually being cleaned by residents, as were the rest of the quarters.

"They were always cleaning," Taylor said. "They didn't verbalize, they produced. People weren't kicking back and just accepting help."

All of the students say the experience has helped them in their own life. They see a value in helping others, getting their minds off their own problems and being responsible.

"If it weren't for my group home and this (community school experience)," Maduro said, "I wouldn't be helping with the earthquake. I'd probably be on the streets trying to start one."