

By LANE WALLACE
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Watsonville Municipal Airport can be a valuable marketing tool for attracting industry to the Pa-

jaro Valley, the airport's manager told a business group in Santa Cruz yesterday.

"There are businesses in the community that are there because of the airport," Airport Manager Kim Wirht told 20 people at a meeting of the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business.

"It would be significant if Granite (Construction) pulled out," said Wirht, who rattled off a list of major businesses that use the airport.

The airport, she estimated, generates \$100 million in direct and indirect revenue to business and industry in the county, without any concerted marketing effort.

Wirht said the \$100 million is an estimate, but said she's confident a study on the economic impacts of the airport will confirm what she is saying. The study, which is being prepared by the staff of the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, is scheduled for completion in June.

The AMBAG report is part of a study on the airport's future being prepared by a citizens' committee in Watsonville. The study was prompted by a proposal by community activist Frank Bardacke that the airport be closed and the land used for low-income housing.

There are a number of possibilities for future improvements at the airport, Wirht said, including passenger service on small planes.

A master plan is being developed for the airport, Wirht said, which will include consideration of the airport's impact on the environment.

"We have been very careful. We have a good safety record," Wirht

said.

Residents of the area have long expressed concern about the airport's operation, and their concerns will be considered, Wirht said.

Watsonville is home to 350 planes, and there is room for more hangars and tie-down space at the airport, Wirht said. There's a waiting list of 150 for hangars; Wirht said about six hangars become available per year.