

5:04 p.m., one year later

By Mary Barnett

At 5:04, October 17, church bells will ring, commemorating the one year anniversary of an event that registered 7.1 magnitude in our memories and in our lives.

The Loma Prieta earthquake, centered on the San Andreas Fault near Aptos, in 15 seconds changed our lives:

•186 San Lorenzo Valley homes were destroyed, representing an estimated \$28 million loss.

•More than 300 San Lorenzo Valley residents were made homeless.

•Hundreds more homes were damaged, for an additional loss of many millions.

•Earth slides made Highway 17 impassable, requiring temporary diversion of traffic to the already overloaded, winding, narrow Valley lifeline, Highway 9.

•Ground fissures opened, cracks appeared in roads, water mains burst, and fires broke out.

In some respects the Valley was lucky. Nobody was killed. None of the five persons in Santa Cruz County who lost their lives in the quake and its aftermath were Valley residents. The Valley suffered no frightful tragedy to equal the collapse of the Cypress Avenue approach to the San Francisco Bay Bridge, with its resulting loss of life. Valley communities escaped

the frightful devastation experienced by downtown Watsonville and Santa Cruz.

But the temblor and the traumatic hours and days that followed took a severe toll from the Valley and its citizens.

On the first anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake, public and private agencies paused to take stock of the progress toward recovery made since those fateful 15 seconds on a mild autumn day in 1989.

The plight of earthquake victims touched the hearts of people throughout the state and nation. Donations poured in to relief organizations. The American Red Cross reports that funds to be spent in Santa Cruz County for earthquake disaster relief total \$11,888,967.

Two San Lorenzo Valley organizations, Valley Churches United and the Valley Resource Center, were recognized on the floor of Congress for their outstanding

response to the latest in a string of Valley disasters.

The county's Earthquake Recovery Unit reports that between Oct. 17, 1989, and Sept. 29, 1990, a total of 6,291 permits have been issued for earthquake repairs, and 16,290 members of the public have been served.

In the San Lorenzo Valley, 1,390 earthquake repair permits have been issued. Total value of the repairs is unknown because no fees are

► Please see Page 4

Page 4

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EARTHQUAKE!

A YEAR OF RECOVERY? HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

► Earthquake —From Page One

charged for earthquake repair permits and thus no valuations are required, but the repairs represent many millions of dollars in costs to homeowners and others.

County Assessor Robert Peterson reports his office has reassessed 3,131 properties which received more than \$5,000 damage from the earthquake, and another 500 reassessments are pending. As a result of the reassessments, the county's total property roll decreased in value by \$120 million.

Federal and state agencies have committed \$115.4 million in earthquake disaster funds to the county for approximately 700 projects. Among these are \$6.5 million in road work funds, \$1.1 million for the mental health department from Project COPE, and \$4.4 million for the county planning department, of which more than \$2 million is for the earthquake unit, according to the County Administrator's Office.

A total of 813 properties in the unincorporated area of the county have been surveyed for possible demolition. Of these, 280 have been demolished by the owners, 118 have been demolished by the county, and 91 are yet to be demolished. Decisions whether to demolish the remaining 324 are pending. It is estimated the total cost of demolitions will exceed \$3.1 million in the unincorporated area of the county alone.

County revenues were slashed by the quake. Losses were suffered in property taxes, deed transfer taxes and sales taxes. Because of the

resulting deficit, the Board of Supervisors has levied a 7 percent utility tax.

Looking back over the past year, Fifth District Supervisor Fred Keeley, who represents the San Lorenzo Valley on the county Board of Supervisors, commented, "Generally, the community has recovered quite well."

He noted that the Valley's three downtown business areas—Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond and Felton—are recovering well. Ben Lomond Super, the Valley's largest

earthquake-damaged commercial structure, is now being rebuilt, Keeley observed, and Boulder Creek and Felton from the outset were fortunate to have relatively minor damage compared to Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

"Economic recovery seems to be taking place," he said, "but residential recovery is very different. There are still hundreds of owners of earthquake-damaged homes who haven't applied for a permit, or who have applied and not received one. For those, there is often a problem in financing their repairs. Many

have experienced delays in Small Business Administration loans."

"Natural disasters have several phases," Keeley noted. "First, there is the emergency response. Then there is a time in which the community assesses the long-term recovery effort. Finally there's the actual recovery phase. That's where we are now. It will take another year or so before we can say the community is fully recovered."

Keeley said the Valley will fully recover in a physical sense, but he adds the past eight years; with its

succession of floods, windstorms and earthquakes, has taken a toll, for better and for worse.

"On the positive side, we have a community unity we didn't have before," he said. "We broke through the political barriers that had been keeping us apart. But on the negative side, are the people whose lives will never be the same. Because of their financial situations, or age, they can't put their lives back together. Some people will be continuing disaster victims."

