

2Q-1989 - Watsonville
The new jobless

Quake throws many people out of work

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If Maria Martinez (not her real name) could just secure a tent, she'd set it up in some parking lot or yard where her family would feel safer until the aftershocks and memories of the Oct. 17 earthquake fade.

A Pajaro resident, Martinez was waiting at a bus stop in front of Watsonville's Employment Development Department the other day, pondering her predicament. Drawing unemployment insurance benefits after seasonal work is finished is an annual tradition for this J.M. Smucker Co. assembly-line worker.

But this year is different.

These days, her 7-year-old, the youngest of her six children whose ages go up to 20, is experiencing difficulty adjusting to life after the earthquake.

"He doesn't eat well, he doesn't want to go to school or bathe alone," Martinez said.

Since the earthquake, the family

has slept "all the way to the front door" on the floor of the living room in the Salinas Road apartment where they live. The three upstairs bedrooms remain unslept in. Martinez hit on the idea of a tent as a way to pacify her youngest, who keeps worrying that the roof is going to cave in.

Instead of drawing unemployment benefits this year, she had hoped to find a job taking care of the elderly. That way, she could catch up on the bills from the trip she and her husband made to Mexico last spring when there was sickness and later, death in his family. Still another death occurred in her husband's immediate family recently, and he's still in his native Michoacan helping out relatives.

She's here with frightened children, more than \$700 in long-distance telephone bills to pay, no car, no work — no security.

"I want to give them (the children) security and tranquility," said the Spanish-speaking Martinez. "But even I don't have that."

While Martinez is not her real name, her story is and so is her plight, and that of many others accounted for in the swelling application statistics compiled by EDD officials these past few weeks.

From Oct. 22 to Oct. 31, 2,149 new claims for unemployment insurance benefits were filed at the Watsonville office, more than triple the number for the same period last year. There are also another 2,000 people who were already on unemployment before the quake.

The figures include people out of work because their businesses haven't reopened since the earthquake.

A young, dark-haired woman seen rushing out the back door of the EDD office is one such displaced worker. "I'm feeling upset," she said in the parking lot. Formerly a social worker, the woman, who wouldn't identify herself, recounted how she left her job in the public sector for a job at a Main Street company.

Now she's out of work and hav-

ing to "go through all the bureaucratic stuff." The last time she applied for unemployment benefits was 10 years ago, she recalled.

"All this is so hard," she said, an attempt at a smile causing her lips to tremble slightly. She quickly excused herself and dashed toward her car.

The Arthur Road office was full of people standing in long lines and filling all available seats near the information booth. As they waited their turn, restless children ran noisily through the building.

Illegal immigrants and many other people who are ineligible to draw regular unemployment insurance benefits, including the self-employed, qualify for such benefits under the disaster-assistance program. The period for disaster-assistance applications to be filed ends on April 20, 1990, La Vera Wilkins, assistant manager of the Watsonville EDD office, said.

But it's anyone's guess how long it will take for those most immediately affected to shake off the experiences they've undergone since 5:04 p.m. Oct. 17.