

Senior centers merging

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WATSONVILLE — The tale of two senior centers is about to come to an end — and a new beginning.

Thursday, the Seniors Council voted to release \$30,000 in funding to Food and Nutrition Services to supply lunches to the Watsonville Seniors Center. And the Watsonville International Seniors Center, just two blocks away on East Beach Street, will merge into the 17-year-old center on Fifth Street.

It was only two months ago that the adamant seniors who run the Watsonville Senior Center took an over-my-dead-body stance on the proposal. They said it would never work, and that Food and Nutrition Services would never respect their right to run their own programs at the center.

But through the patient and persistent negotiations of Watsonville City Councilman Dennis Osmer and city staff, and with a threat by the Seniors Council to withdraw the center's funding, the cost-saving move is about to become a reality.

"Dennis Osmer put his heart and soul into it," said Seniors Council director Jennifer Davis. "He made sure we stayed apprised, and made frequent phone contact with me and the board president. He definitely took the moral high ground in all this; he acknowledged that he went into it opposing the merger and listened to the facts, and he came out of it seeing that it was the right thing to do."

Not that anyone took the low ground. But feelings ran high over the proposed merger, with years of ill will to be overcome between the Seniors Council and the Association of Watsonville Area Seniors, which runs the Watsonville Senior Center. AWAS members were afraid of losing control over a creative and popular volunteer-centered program they had developed over the years. And some of the largely immigrant clientele of the Watsonville International Senior Center were afraid they'd be uncomfortable — perhaps even unwelcome — at the larger Watsonville Senior Center, which is dominated by the old Watsonville establishment.