

# Quake survivors recall fateful day

Ford's department store employees reunite after more than eight years

Earthquake  
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SANTA CRUZ — Old friends and some of the last co-workers of the former Ford's department store held hands Sunday, standing for a moment of silence.

But it wasn't the same kind of silence worker Leon Gregory heard the late afternoon of Oct. 17, 1989, when he saw the ceiling of Ford's tear open with a wall of brick, killing a customer and destroying the store forever.

It wasn't the silence before the cries

for help. Or the silence they all heard before their lives would change dramatically.

Instead, it was a silence of thanks they could still stand together years after and remember a friend.

More than 18 former workers of the now-defunct downtown Santa Cruz store hugged, clenched hands and smiled for pictures at the De Laveaga Golf Course restaurant in their first reunion in more than eight years since the tragedy.

Some had been in the store at Cathcart

3-9-98  
Street and Pacific Avenue when the 7.1 magnitude quake struck at 5:04 p.m. Some visited the wreckage. Others said they just remember the thriving department store the way it was.

"It was very abrupt," said Janet Atkins, who formerly headed the housewares department. "I almost felt sorry I wasn't there for the earthquake. Because it was my day off and no one was allowed back to it later, I never saw it again."

But for Gregory, and many others, the

Please see REUNION — BACK PAGE

*'The shaking was like 15 freight trains'*



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Leon Gregory, center, and other former Ford's workers gathered for the first time since the quake.

## Reunion

Continued from Page A1

sound of a passing truck or other loud noise was enough to interrupt the deadest of nights in the year after.

"The shaking was like 15 freight trains," he said, his voice shaking with recollection. Gregory had dived under a desk at the sight of the ceiling ripping in two.

That day, he helped to rescue at least two other co-workers, one of whom nearly lost a leg, Edith Dominguez.

"Leon's our hero," said Dorothy Douzeff, who had been scheduled to work at 6 p.m. A co-worker had called her to tell her the building

wasn't there after the earthquake hit. Not believing, she went anyway.

Customer Kay Trieman was was killed in the store's collapse. All store workers survived. Dominguez, however, lost her fight with cancer just two years ago.

Douzeff and Gregory were some of the people who organized the reunion.

"I'm just elated," said Douzeff, her eyes glistening as she saw faces from her time at the store file into the restaurant.

Although the quake was strong enough to destroy buildings throughout the Bay Area, it didn't

keep most of the 25 staff members from coming together again. Or from leaving Santa Cruz County.

Still, piecing together their lives took time, many said. Gregory said the closeness of the group acted as the glue.

"It put us out of a job instantly," he said. "But everyone was so helpful in the aftermath of the disaster. That was what was so encouraging."

Gabe Perez, of Aptos, took a job at another store just prior to the earthquake.

"It's really nice to see they're still going on stronger than ever," he said.