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Architect seeks pre-quake feeling

By Bob Johnson
Special to the Mercury News

Plans for downtown Watsonville's Main Street, nearly leveled in the Oct. 17 earthquake, call for buildings that help create the feeling of community.

"There was a neighborly, inviting, pedestrian scale to Watsonville before the earthquake," architect Bob Corbett said. "I'm trying to recreate some of that feeling."

Corbett will be designing the three buildings to go up on the 300 block of Main Street. One of the

buildings, directly across from the town plaza, will include a town clock. The structure also will have first-floor retail shops and second-story apartments and offices.

Corbett said that before the quake, buildings in downtown Watsonville reflected diverse styles of architecture.

"The center of downtown Watsonville has always been a collection of small buildings of diverse heights, architectural styles, colors and materials," he said. "I likened it to Main Street USA. To take a

block that is 500 feet long and create a single structure might be fine for the suburbs, but not for Watsonville."

Over the past year the soft-spoken Corbett has emerged as a major architect of the new downtown Watsonville.

Three blocks north of the plaza, he designed the interior of the 1930s Pacific Gas & Electric Co. building that will become the Jalisco restaurant. The building, which features arched interiors and a tile roof, was damaged in the quake.

"The Jalisco project is going to be wonderful," Corbett said. "It's a fantastic building and it's going to make a wonderful restaurant."

He is also the architect for the current rehabilitation of the 67-year-old Fox Theater, one block south of the plaza, and of an adjacent two-story commercial residential project that will be built where the Herrera building stood before the earthquake. The project will have shops and offices.

He also designed a series of
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“He’s paying attention to the broader picture.”

— Dick Bernard,
recovery committee