

# Whole state' watching Watsonville

By JAMIE MARKS  
Sentinel staff writer

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WATSONVILLE — The clock is ticking toward Tuesday's historic City Council election, the first held under a court-mandated district system of voting.

Despite a magnitude-7.1 earthquake that derailed the election by a month and jolted everyone's priorities, candidates and supporters made a last-minute blitz over the weekend to get out the vote.

"The whole state of California is watching Watsonville," said Tina Delgado, a campaign worker for Cruz Gomez.

Delgado's right. Media from across the state and nation have come to Watsonville to write about the rise of the Latino voice through the power of their vote.

"Su vota es su voz," read the notices around town. In English, that means, "Your vote is your voice."

The election will bring on five, and possibly six, new council members to deal with the post-quake

reconstruction.

The election could prove to be a watershed for the city. Some 60 percent of the people living in Watsonville are Latino, yet until 1987 none had won a council seat. The reality is that despite their numbers, many Latinos are not registered to vote because they are not yet citizens.

Some 10,328 voters are registered in the city limits, which is a record number for any election. However, City Clerk Lorraine Washington believes the turnout at the voting booth will be low.

"In a typical election year when the mayor is elected, we have 50-percent turnout. But with a City Council race alone, it's usually around 30 percent. A couple of weeks ago I was predicting 30-percent turnout, but I think that's optimistic because of the earthquake," Washington said.

A number of people have moved away and countless others have been displaced by the earthquake.

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## Council/ Historic vote Tuesday

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A record number of absentee ballots — 890 — have been requested, according to Washington. They are being used primarily in Districts 1, 2, 3 and 6.

Cruz Gomez is running for office from District 1, the industrial west side. She ran for office unsuccessfully in 1983 and two years later sued the city, charging the election system discriminated against Latinos.

The lawsuit resulted in the landmark decision of July 1988 by the U.S. Court of Appeals, which found that communities with large minority populations must implement district systems of voting to ensure equal representation.

And so it's down to the wire.

Gomez has found herself in a tough battle for the District 1 seat against candidate Paul Milladin, a frozen-food executive and landlord.

Milladin is no stranger to the Latino community, having been an employer, landlord and parishoner at Assumption Church in Pajaro for many years.

It's a difficult race for Gomez, because although 80 percent of the westside is listed as Latino in the 1980 Census on which the district boundaries were drawn, scores of new Anglo families have moved into the district in the new housing developments on the north side of the city.

In 1980, the Latino voters numbered 62 percent of the District

1 electorate. But now, the number has shrunk to 30 percent of the 1,369 voters.

Milladin says he's been working hard and believes he'll win. "It's very close," he said last week.

Gomez is optimistic, too.

"I think we're at a threshold of a new direction for Watsonville," she said. "All we can hope for is that it will be a healthy direction that will provide for many more groups of people."

Besides the pivotal District 1 race, the campaigns in the six other districts in Watsonville seem to be close.

In District 2 (downtown), the candidates are paralegal Dan Dodge, community activist Oscar Rios and interior designer Ray Hoffman.

District 2 is one of the two electoral districts specifically drawn to enhance the chances of a Latino winning office. Some 78 percent of the people are Latino, according to the 1980 Census.

In District 3 (northside), teacher Lowell Hurst and Soledad postmaster David Wildman are running. Businessman Robert Armstrong hasn't waged an active campaign.

In District 4 (Freedom-Pennsylvania), incumbent Gwen Carroll is in a tight race with attorney Todd McFarren.

In District 5 (Jefferson Street), businessman Luis DeLaCruz and businessman Parr Eves are neck and neck.

In District 6 (Brewington-Martinelli), incumbents Betty Murphy and Tony Campos are in a very close race.

In District 7 (eastside), retired Lt. Col. Johnny Kacsmaryk is running against school supervisor Robert Chacanaca.

Besides the council, the voters have 12 amendments to the City Charter to decide on and two other controversial issues.

Voters are being asked on Measure M to continue a 4-percent utility tax to raise sorely needed revenue, and with Measure N to enact a new mobile-home rent control law.

The Charter amendments, Measures A through L, include limiting council members to two terms in office and holding council elections in November of odd years (instead of May of odd years).

This is the first time the city residents won't get to decide who will be the mayor. Instead, the mayor will be chosen from among the winners at the first meeting after the election.

At that meeting, the council will also decide by lot which terms of office will be for two and four years.

Then in 1991, the process will begin anew for half of the council. New district boundaries will be drawn at the completion of the 1990 Census, and half of the council will have to run for re-election.