

The beds are made, but new homeless shelter sits empty

Homeless - 2000

RP 12-507

Maj. Carlos Gonzzatti, commanding officer of the Watsonville Salvation Army, shows some of the 25 beds that sit empty and waiting for Watsonville's homeless. The new shelter on Union Street remains closed long after its dedication ceremony on Sept. 6.

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Inspectors keep doors closed at Salvation Army structure

By ROGER SIDEMAN
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A dedication ceremony in early September heralded in the new Salvation Army homeless shelter in downtown Watsonville, but as winter approaches, the new bunk beds remain untouched. Built to house 20 to 25 of the city's homeless in clean, comfortable quarters, the Union Street building sits empty because a final city inspection

revealed more than half a dozen unauthorized changes were made to the building's original blueprints.

"The new building will offer quite a bit of difference in comfort and security, but for me the most important thing is dignity, because now they're still sleeping on the floor," said Maj. Carlos Gonzzatti, commanding officer of the Watsonville Salvation Army.

Every night after dinner in the old facility, the tables are cleared and the homeless roll

out thin sleeping mats on the floor. There's room for about 15 people in the dining room, which on some nights reaches capacity, forcing Gonzzatti to turn people away. He's impatient for the new building to get the final OK from the city Community Development Department.

"I really hope to work out the details before Christmas," he said.

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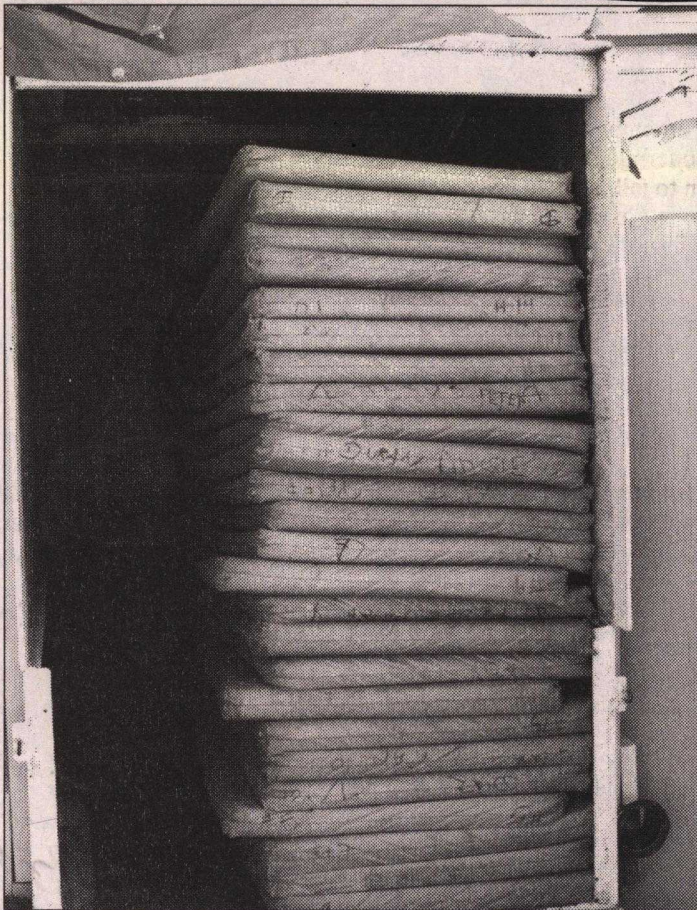
John Doughty, the city's Community Development director, cited a list of problems with the 2,160-square-foot modular unit, from the handicapped ramps and parking, to landscaping and the amount of setback space from the street.

In one case, volunteers installed a wooden fence where handicapped parking was supposed to be located. Other aspects of the building were improvised to save money, which developer Michael Bethke of Slatter Construction calls an innocent mistake.

"It's what happens when you get a lot of people volunteering and working on a shoestring budget," Bethke said. "Little hiccups like this are going to happen, but they are certainly not permanent hiccups."

Bethke said that the building could be opened up before Christmas, depending on when the architect submits his revised plans to the city.

Meanwhile, each of the new beds are still neatly made, each with a bath towel and bar of soap at the foot. With the new building, the Salvation Army hopes to clear up space for a series of evening programs in its existing building, including Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts gatherings.



Roger Sideman/Register-Pajaronian

Soiled mattresses are still pulled from a shed every night and placed on the floor of the dining hall at the Salvation Army homeless shelter.

But the expansion doesn't stop there.

At a cost of \$250,000, the modular units are considered temporary, and will eventually be replaced by permanent

structures, Gonzzatti said.

The Salvation Army must raise \$10 million to \$15 million to build the permanent structures, hoping to reach its goal over the next five years.