

Gottschalks closes its doors



A work crew breaks down display racks and shelves at Gottschalks department store on Monday after the business closed its doors in Watsonville altogether Sunday. Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

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Furnishings moved out Monday; property owner searches for new tenant

By JON CHOWN

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The few furnishings remaining in Gottschalks were being moved out Monday following the conclusion of the downtown department store's liquidation.

Liquidators inside would not answer any questions, but Register-Pajaronian staff got a quick glimpse inside the store before being asked to leave. The building is now virtually empty. About a dozen people were working inside.

The store at 407 Main St. was considered the anchor business for downtown Watsonville. Now, the empty building is surrounded by other closed businesses. Most of the historical Kalich Building, from 428 to 434 Main, is empty. The Chavez Furniture building at 555 Main and the I.O.O.F. Building at 433 Main are both empty.

Before Gottschalks, the site housed Ford's department store, which was a popular downtown business for decades. The 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake temporarily

closed the store, which reopened in 1991. A year later, Charles Ford Co. went out of business after 141 years, and the Watsonville store was closed.

Bill Hansen bought the building in 1995 and leased it to Gottschalks. Since the announcement that Gottschalks would close, he has been working on finding a new tenant. How that search is going, only Hansen knows.

See GOTTSCHALKS, page A2

GOTTSCHALKS

From page A1

"I know Bill Hansen is working very hard on trying to get a tenant, but I don't know any specifics," City Manager Carlos Palacios said.

Hansen did not return calls as of press time Monday. In an interview on March 31, he said the Gottschalks store was profitable and only closed "because of the issues corporatewide."

"You'd be amazed how many

inquiries there are," he said then. "I'm not taking my marbles and going somewhere else. I'm committed to the downtown and I'm committed to the revitalization of Watsonville."

A joint venture of SB Capital Group of New York, Tiger Capital Group LLC of Boston, Great American Group of Los Angeles and Hudson Capital Partners of Massachusetts liquidated the store. The same four companies also conducted the going-out-of-business sales for bankrupt retailers Mervyns and Circuit City.