

Out of the tents, into the trailers

Families move into FEMA's mobile homes

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WATSONVILLE — Eleven families left homeless after the earthquake made the move from tents to mobile homes Saturday morning, leaving behind the makeshift community at Callaghan Park where they had lived since Oct. 17.

"It may have seemed to take a long time to get these going, but it really didn't," said Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy, one of more than a dozen local, state and federal officials introduced to the families waiting to move into the mobile homes behind the Santa Cruz County Courthouse Annex on Freedom Boulevard.

Gloria Sanchez, who's been living in a tent at the park since the quake, waited patiently as Murphy and others took turns lauding the bureaucratic efforts that went into readying the 43 mobile homes brought into the county by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Sanchez said she would be relieved when the speakers finished their business so that she, her husband and little boy and girl could move into the three-bedroom trailer.

"They have heaters," Sanchez said. "We won't have telephones until Dec. 15, but we've gone this long so we can wait until the 15th."

When the speakers were done, a symbolic red tape that barred the families from the trailers was cut and the families were introduced to their new homes.

Young Rafael Sanchez and his sister Martha lugged plastic garbage bags filled with sheets, towels and other household items up the stairs and into their mobile home, while their mother went to visit with neighbors.

Gloria Sanchez and her family were left homeless when their duplex on Palm Avenue crumpled during the quake. Sanchez, who was born and raised in Watsonville, said her family has never been back to the condemned house to retrieve their possessions.

"These clothes I'm wearing, they're donated," she said. "Everything we have is donated."

Her husband, Rafael Sanchez, is an unemployed mechanic. "He works when he can get a job, but right now there just aren't many jobs and there are lots of people looking for work,"



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Homeless quake victims wait for officials to end the ceremony so they can move into their mobile homes.

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— Gloria Sanchez, former tent city resident

Sanchez said.

As happy as she was to move into the mobile home, Sanchez said she is still worried about the future.

"In 18 months we have to find a place to live, which is going to be hard because we're low income," Sanchez said.

The opening of the mobile homes sounded the death knell for Callaghan Park's tent city, which once held 150 people. Eleven of the 13 families that

were living there moved into mobile homes, while others have moved into shelters, motels or back into their repaired homes.

The tent city at Callaghan Park and other tent cities in Watsonville sprang up moments after the earthquake, as countless families left their damaged homes or sought the relative safety of living outside as the aftershocks persisted.

All of the other makeshift shelters disbanded as families moved into Red Cross shelters or other homes.

But the families at Callaghan refused, saying they wanted to stay near their children's school and their jobs. They also didn't want to be pushed out of town, where they feared they would be forgotten.

Their persistence paid off.

Some of the families that have been staying at the National Guard Armory at Watsonville Airport will be moved into some of the unoccupied mobile homes Sunday, followed Monday by some families that have been staying in the shelter at the County Fairgrounds shelter. Thirty-three more mobile homes are expected to be set up at St. Francis School here this weekend and should be occupied by next weekend.