

Post office party

New Watsonville facility saluted

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WATSONVILLE — For U.S. Postal Service and Watsonville city officials, it was the culmination of years of hard work. For others, like 91-year-old Otto McIntyre, it was simply a chance to "see what goes on behind the counters."

McIntyre, who has lived in Watsonville 75 years, was one of more than 300 people who showed up Friday at the grand-opening celebration of the city's new 22,000-square-foot post office.

"I've never seen what goes on behind the (post office) counters before," McIntyre said of his reason for attending. "It's very interesting."

The new facility, located on downtown's Main Street across from Watsonville City Hall, is nearly twice the size of the old post office on Union Street, said Watsonville Postmaster Rudy Bejarana. It services 17,542 households, and collects annual receipts of \$5 million.

Bejarana addressed the crowd outside the entrance to the post office. He was joined by Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios and Jim Aanenson, general manager/postmaster of the San Jose division.

All three speakers said the new post office will add to Watsonville's comeback from the 1989 earthquake. Rios called the post office the "cornerstone of the community," adding, "The city is really coming along, particularly the downtown area. This is a major addition to the 200 block (of Main Street)."

Aanenson noted that the postal service had planned to build the new facility before the earthquake. However, he conceded that the time schedule was accelerated after the earthquake.

Postmaster Bejarana explained that earliest records reveal the Watsonville Post Office was established Nov. 21, 1853. The net receipts of the office were \$65 and the

postmaster's salary was \$164 a year.

Rural delivery service didn't start until June 11, 1900, Bejarana said, with one carrier serving 1,500 households on a 26-mile-long route. City delivery was started Jan. 2, 1901. Today, the Watsonville facility has 58 full-time carriers, 10 part-time carriers and 23 clerks. The delivery area includes not only Watsonville, but La Selva Beach, Corralitos, Pajaro and parts of Prunedale, Las Lomas and the Summit area on Hecker Pass.

As the dignitaries spoke, it was business as usual at the post office. A line of cars continually pulled into the parking lot, with customers coming and going.

A brightly lit interior welcomes customers at the new post office office. The lobby is three times larger than the old facility, and is painted gray with a teal blue accent.

Friday's tours included a behind-the-scenes look at operations. Visitors were able to see how the mail comes in and is sorted, by distribution clerks and then mail carriers.

Distribution clerk Dave Vega, who sorts between 1,200 and 1,500 pieces of mail an hour, said the increased space of new post office is its biggest attribute.

"There's a lot more space, making it much easier to work," he said. "Before, especially at Christmas time, you couldn't move

around back here at all."

Aromas Postmaster George Bloesch agreed. Bloesch, who worked at the Watsonville facility for 26 years, said he wished they had as much room when he was there.

The new post office actually opened last October, and was part of the city's second anniversary of

the earthquake celebration downtown. However, postal offices delayed the grand-opening ceremony in order to get the operation up and running full bore.

City officials attending the event included councilmen Tony Campos, Parr Eves and Lowell Hurst, as well as long-time former councilwoman Betty Murphy.