

Santa Cruz YWCA breaks with national organization

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SANTA CRUZ — Philosophic and financial differences have led the local branch of the YWCA to break away from its national headquarters and operate under a new name.

The branch officially becomes the Walnut Avenue Women's Center at an open house and celebration scheduled for 5 to 7 p.m. Nov. 4 at the center, 303 Walnut Ave.

"We are not looking at it as a negative thing at all," said Dee O'Brien, the center's executive director. "It was a mutual decision. We're still doing the same things we always did. We'll just be doing them with a new name."

"The national office really envisioned a traditional Y with a pool and a gymnasium and a residency program, but this Y was always really much more of a community-based, service-oriented facility."

The Santa Cruz branch offers aerobics classes, but does not have a residency program or pool. Instead it focuses most of its energy on affordable child care, support groups for breast cancer survivors and programs for battered women, O'Brien said.

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— Dee O'Brien,
Walnut Avenue
Women's Center

A representative at the YWCA's national headquarters in New York City did not return a telephone call to comment.

Santa Cruz's 16-member board began talking about breaking away in February. The board voted to go its own way in September, following a series of meetings at which members expressed support.

The separation was spurred by the magnitude-7.1 earthquake that rocked the area on Oct. 17, 1989. O'Brien said the national office offered little support for recovery ef-

forts and threatened to disfranchise the branch if it did not catch up on its fees.

Santa Cruz was one \$750 installment payment behind at the time, O'Brien said.

Local branches pay about 2.2 percent of their income to the national office, which for Santa Cruz amounted to between \$8,000 and \$12,000 a year, O'Brien said. "For us, since we don't have a lot of income-generating programs, that was a lot of money," she said.

The Santa Cruz branch opened in 1944 and is one of three others in the region. YWCA branches also operate in Monterey, San Jose and Watsonville.

The branch has an annual budget of about \$400,000 and serves about 1,200 clients a year, including 800 in battered women's programs.

Next month's celebration will feature a slide show and the formal unveiling of the new Walnut Avenue Women's Center's logo, designed by artist and longtime Y member Hulda McLean.

McLean said she supports the separation because to stay would have been too costly. "I think it was necessary," she said.