

Some historic evening

Watsonville gets its first Latino mayor

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — History was made Tuesday night when three Latinos were sworn in as Watsonville City Council members.

Incumbent Oscar Rios was joined by fellow Latinos Tony Campos and Al Alcalá — along with incumbent Councilwoman Betty Bobeda — during the happy ceremony at City Hall in front of a standing-room-only crowd of about 150 people. All four ran unopposed in last week's election.

It is the first time in Watsonville's 123-year city history that more than one Latino will serve on the council at the same time. In fact, there have been only two Latinos ever on the council: Rios from 1989 to the present and Campos, who served from 1987 through 1989.

Adding even more history to the occasion was Rios' unanimous appointment as mayor for a year by the new council. Two-year Councilman Lowell Hurst was also unanimously appointed vice mayor. Both votes were somewhat anti-climatic, taking less than a minute.

Rios, 41, a labor organizer for the Cannery Workers Project in Watsonville, succeeded Todd McFarren as mayor. McFarren, who had been mayor for two years, will remain on the council.

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Stepping down from the council were 12½-year council veteran Betty Murphy and two-year Councilman Paul Milladin. Murphy received a standing ovation. Both she and Milladin accepted several awards of appreciation.

Besides being mayor, Rios will continue to represent the heavily Latino downtown-residential District 1.

Bobeda, 55, a shipping clerk at RomaKool Berries, will fill the re-

maining two years of the late Johnny Kacsmayk's term in eastside District 7.

For Campos, a 48-year-old real-estate agent in Watsonville, it's a return to the council. He takes over Murphy's Brewington-Martinelli District 6 seat. Alcalá, 58, a Watsonville insurance broker, replaces Milladin in westside District 1. Alcalá previously served as Milladin's Planning Commission appointee for two years.

McFarren handed the gavel over

to Rios, calling it a "historic step." Rios stepped into the mayor's seat to a loud ovation and the rhythmic chanting of "Oscar!" from the large crowd, many of whom were Latino.

The election of three Latinos to the seven-member council is being hailed as a victory for Watsonville's Latinos. It is a direct result of a successful two-year legal battle that ended at-large elections and brought district elections to Watsonville in 1989 in order to

better represent Latinos.

McFarren said later of Rios, "There's going to be an awful lot of expectations on him from Latinos. They're going to expect Oscar to deliver maybe more than humanly possible.

"But Oscar has surprised a lot of people," he said. "He's shown an ability to grasp the broadest issues that face the entire community."

McFarren was also honored for his two years as mayor, including the tough times after the October

1989 earthquake. He cited the speed and quality of rebuilding downtown Watsonville as the highlight of his mayorship.

"The deeper I understood the job, the more I learned how much the people of the Pajaro Valley cared about Watsonville," McFarren said.

Earlier, McFarren lauded outgoing Councilwoman Murphy as being "simply one of the most popular politicians in Watsonville city history."

Quoting a favorite Murphy saying, McFarren added, "George may never come home to Martha, but now at least Betty can come home to Bill (her husband)."

Bill Murphy later presented his wife with a membership in the American Association of Retired Persons.

Betty Murphy, also a past mayor, thanked everyone for allowing her to serve on the council.