

# Local

EARTHQUAKE '89 - Watsonville

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## YWCA decision was tough one Money fells quake-damaged building

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WATSONVILLE — For the board members of the Watsonville YWCA, a recent decision to demolish their stunning facility was “gut wrenching.”

The YWCA, located in a Carmel-stone 4,500 square-foot former residence on East Beach Street, was severely damaged in the October earthquake. Virtually the entire stone exterior had to be replaced, sheer wall needed to be installed on interior walls, new plumbing was needed and electrical wiring needed to be redone. Also, vandals had damaged some of the interior.

Faced with an estimated \$400,000 repair bill just to bring the building to an acceptable condition to re-open, the board decided to tear it down and build a new structure.

The decision wasn't made hastily. Board President Nancy Driscoll said initially the board had decided to repair the old building. Then representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency told her the agency would finance a grant to build a new facility.

At more than one board meeting, the members asked themselves whether a rebuilt or new facility would better serve their goals.

“It was a gut-wrenching decision,”

Driscoll said. “One board member played there as a little girl. We were all clear about the sentiment in the community. People are upset that so many buildings are going down. We had to weigh the emotional versus the practical, and in the end, practicality won out.” It will take years for the YWCA to rebuild, said Executive Director Lorraine Phillips, so in the interim, the agency has turned to temporary alternatives.

The non-profit agency has rented a trailer on the site to house the after-school program and an office has been found on Arthur Road.

“We're still running the programs we had before the earthquake and we've added some new ones,” Phillips said.

Besides the after-school program, the YWCA has women's workshops and leases space to Cabrillo College.

But for now, the Y's big money-raising activity has been eliminated. No longer can the home be rented out to wedding parties, social gatherings and meetings.

Phillips said the YWCA has owned the building since October 1977. It was built in 1930 by the late Frank Orr's grandfather, and Belle Fletcher, Orr's aunt, lived in it for many years. Before being sold to the YWCA, Bob and Shirely Manfre raised their family in the home.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A \$400,000 quake-repair estimate doomed the Watsonville YWCA.

One reason it would be so expensive to repair is that only one quarry in the area has Carmel stone, and it isn't being mined, Phillips said. “That really added to the expense,” she said.

The Y board is hoping to re-create a similar building, although the new one will be better suited to a public facility, according to Phillips. The hope is to have a larger kitchen, more meeting rooms, and more rooms for female boarders.

The board plans to create a community-based committee to select an architect and design for the new facility.

Funding will likely come from FEMA, but other sources may be tapped, Phil-

lips said. It will cost at least \$600,000 to build a new facility.

Driscoll said the “main thrust will be in providing women's housing.”

The old facility housed five women who each paid \$150 a month rent. These women have been displaced because of the earthquake.

Because of the dire need for housing in South County, particularly for women recently divorced or in transition, the plans are to add up to 10 boarding rooms to the new building.

“It was a sad decision for all of us, but it was hard to justify spending \$400,000 and still not have a building that was functional,” Phillips said.