

WATSONVILLE
HISTORY - 1996 - 2000

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Gottschalks arrives

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Hundreds showed up this morning for the much awaited opening of Gottschalks, a store many believe will provide the business anchor for downtown Watsonville.

Store manager Theo Wierdsma, speaking at this morning's ribbon-cutting ceremony, said the store's opening marks a "historical occasion" in Watsonville. Wierdsma promised high quality, good value, and customer service that will rival Ford's department store, which closed its doors about two years ago. Gottschalks moved into the Ford's building.

"We want to be your home town store," Wierdsma said. "I want this to be perfect for you."

Mayor Tony Campos, also speaking at the ceremony, said the city worked hard to bring the store to Watsonville, calling the opening of Gottschalks one of the "high points" of his eight-month term as mayor. He praised city officials and Gottschalks for having faith in Watsonville.

"Thank you for believing in Watsonville and its people," Campos said. He said the store's opening signals a new era for Watsonville.

"As you walk through those doors, you are (embarking) on a new beginning for Watsonville," Campos said.

The ceremony was attended by numerous business leaders, city officials, and Gottschalks' representatives, including Joe Levy, Gottschalks' chairman.

"We are here to serve Watsonville," Levy said. With that he announced, "Let's get this store open."

As the ribbon was cut, a mariachi band began to play and the crowd moved through the doors.

Today opening was "Charity Day," in which customers had to buy a \$5 ticket from their favorite charity. In return, they got three discount coupons, one for 10 percent and two for 20 percent. Some 70 charities were given about 30,000 tickets. Several charity organization were on hand today

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Michael McCollum

Joe Levy, chairman and CEO of Gottschalks, wields giant scissors to snip the ribbon to open the company's newest store located in the former Ford's building in downtown Watsonville. Dozens of community leaders, politicians and onlookers were on hand for the ceremonies marking the first department store in the downtown area since Ford's closed almost two years ago.

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selling tickets. Tomorrow, the store will be open to the general public.

Once inside the store, the crowd quickly spread out. One of the first buyers was Fernanda Meneses, of Watsonville.

Meneses and a friend stopped at the jewelry counter, where Meneses bought a bracelet. Meneses was "thrilled" Gottschalks opened a store in Watsonville. She shops at the Gottschalks store in Capitola,

but having a Gottschalks in Watsonville will be more convenient, she said.

"It's hectic going back and forth to the mall," Meneses said. "This (store) is great."

Meneses said before Gottschalks there wasn't a place in town where one could go to get a nice gift or other high quality merchandise.

Two old Fords tenants — Vicky's Beauty Salon and Bake-Rite — will be housed in the store. Casablanca Travel Agency, which provides bilingual services, will also have an office in the store. Bass ticket

service will open in the store within two weeks.

Special grand opening store hours will be in effect this week. The store will be open today and tomorrow from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. From Wednesday through Friday, it will be open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. On Saturday, it will be open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Starting Sunday, the store will have regular hours. On Sunday it will be open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Thursday it will be open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., on Friday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.