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✓ A school continues to recover

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Loma Prieta School

SUMMIT — In the five years since the earth shivered and reduced Loma Prieta Elementary School to a broken shell, rebuilding it has become as much a part of mountain life as snakes and floods.

"We're always recovering from (the quake)," said Lee Tinder, superintendent of the tiny, two-school Loma Prieta district. "... It's been a real ordeal for everybody. But that era is just about finished."

After two years of disruption, cramped quarters and rain-delayed construction, the new elementary school is open. Today, at 5:04 p.m., a plaque will be placed at the flagpole out front to dedicate the campus.

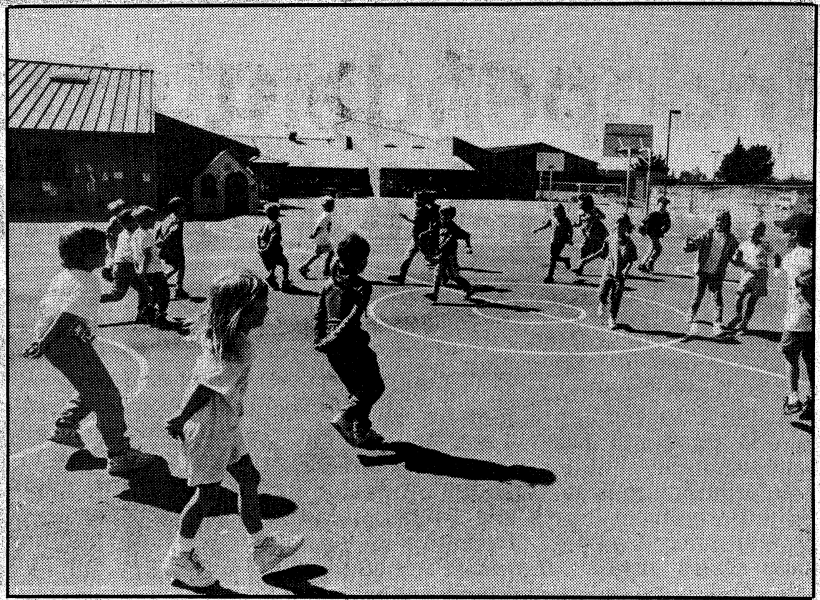
The lesson Tinder sees cemented in the gleaming classrooms and new playground is one teachers have been recalling for students since the quake.

"Recovering from the earthquake is enabling a lot of nice things to happen," said Tinder. "Look at what we've done since."

The new \$4.5 million school has 17 airy classrooms, a technology lab, a library, a spacious school assembly room and an outdoor amphitheater. Individual classrooms branch off from common rooms where groups of children can work together.

It sits across the parking lot from C.T. English Middle School, where all the district's children shared quarters until construction of the new campus was completed last March.

This fall, 372 elementary students are enrolled — a big jump



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

New Loma Prieta playground will be celebrated today.

since June, something Tinder sees as another sign of the district's recovery.

The school's "earthquake-resistant" design, complete with a 36-inch concrete foundation, was something former superintendent Ken Simpkins fought for in his long battle to win state approval for rebuilding near a site plagued by trace faults.

Ironically, the old elementary school was on the road to being condemned before the quake. In 1988, state inspectors discovered trace faults underneath portions of the school and declared them unsafe.

The Loma Prieta quake, centered about 5 miles away from the district, just sped up the process, says Tinder.

Some emergency state and federal aid was granted, but the community soon became the main resource for the district to rebuild. Businesses and clubs adopted classrooms. A \$150-per-parcel tax

was approved by 76 percent of voters in 1991.

That support not only helped finance the school, but added a garden terrace to the adjacent community center, and fixed up the landscaping, lights and paving at the middle school. A new parking lot is nearly done.

The next phase, Tinder said, is to rehabilitate the old school site across Summit Road. A pedestrian walkway is planned to link playing fields on both sides. The district is petitioning the state to allow them to keep a kindergarten classroom and an administration building to lease out as a preschool, or to community organizations. The few classrooms that aren't demolished could be used as meeting space for their recreation department, Tinder says.

"We couldn't be more pleased with the way things are turning out," said Tinder. "The quake is a memory we live with, one of life's experiences, but things are coming back very well."