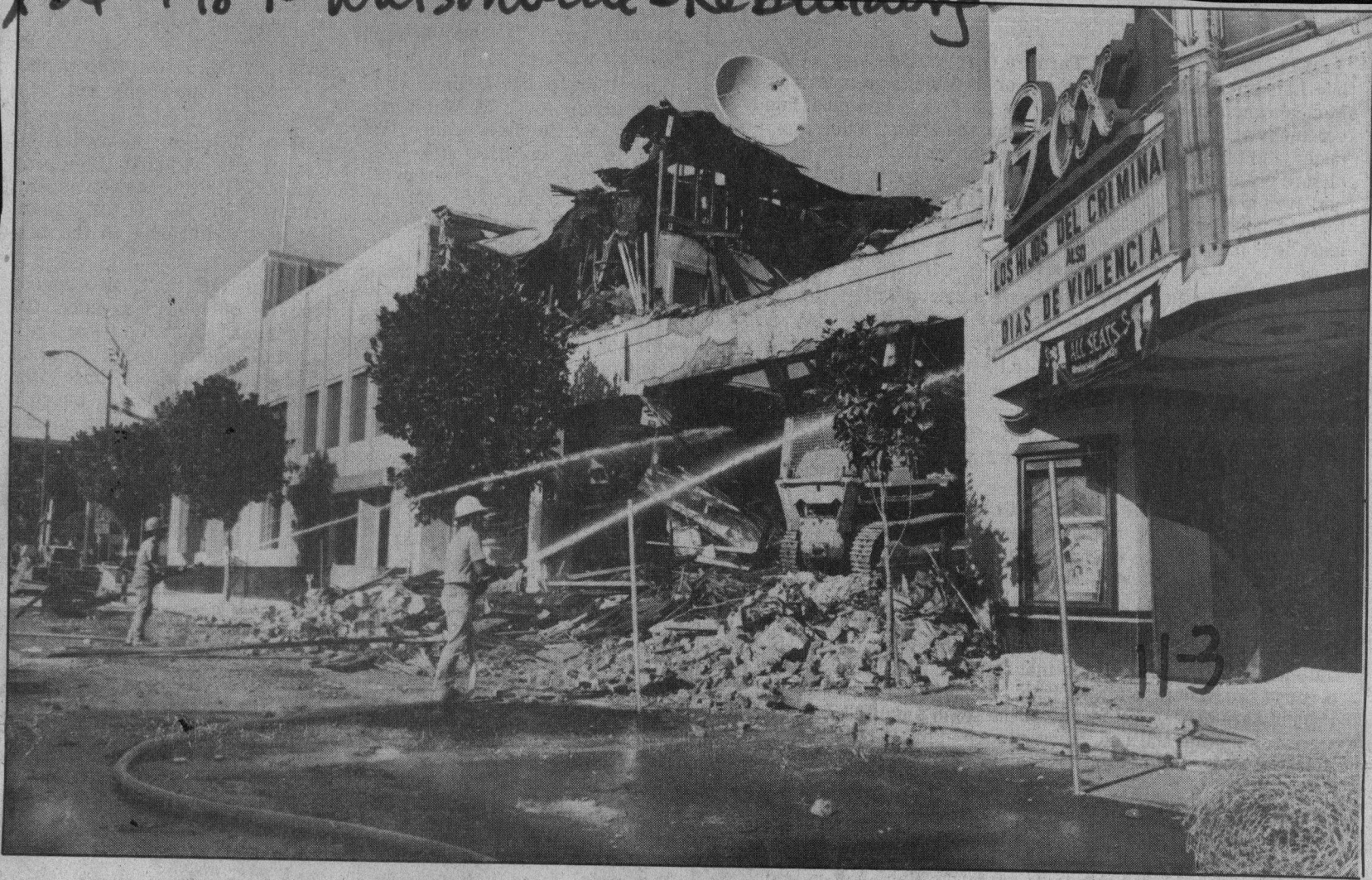


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Mike McCollum

Firemen hose down just demolished Hildreth Building on Main Street as precautionary measure.

Main Street comes back to life

Merchants struggle to cope with disaster

By LANE WALLACE
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Downtown Watsonville merchants are falling into four basic categories these days: Open, waiting to open, looking for a new place and already relocated.

Those who have reopened since the Oct. 17 earthquake did major damage to downtown are getting customers, generally at a slower-than-normal pace; those looking to relocate are finding a limited number of spaces available; and those who plan to reopen at their old places are anxious.

Last weekend, the city opened the 500, 600 and 700 blocks of

Main Street and gave clearance to businesses in the 300 and 400 blocks to open if they have rear entrances, provided their buildings are sound.

Since then, Main Street has been coming back to life, although "it will be quite some time before it's back to the way it was on Oct. 16," said Don Henrichsen, owner of John's Shoe Store at 456 Main St.

Business has picked up during the week to the point of being "quite busy" by yesterday, Henrichsen said.

The long-term outlook for downtown is difficult to get a handle on, because the city is still

waiting for owners of more than 32 buildings to decide whether they want to demolish or try to renovate.

At Lupe's House of Beauty, at 3 West Beach St., business has been "really slow," said owner Lupe Flores. The shop has been open since the Saturday after the earthquake. Some customers are afraid to come downtown and others don't want to fight the traffic, Flores said, adding, "I'm sure business will get better" when Main Street is reopened.

David Fernandez, owner of Tuxedo World, at 27 W. Lake Ave., said he was open soon after the earthquake, but people who

had rented tuxes for that weekend cancelled. "I couldn't stop the shipment," Fernandez said, adding that business has picked up since. But Fernandez's other business, Bridal Veil, on Main Street, remains closed, and he doesn't yet know he'll do with the business.

J.C. Penney Co., on Main Street at West Lake Avenue, reopened Monday. Business has been "pretty soft," manager Laurette Chauvin said, adding that she expects things to improve after Main Street opens.

At McMahan's Furniture, 543

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Main St., business has been good since the store reopened Sunday, manager Del Zack said. Replacement of televisions, VCRs and glass items have been good sellers, he said. To those whose TV sets were broken in the quake, "it was like losing a friend," Zack said.

These are some of the other downtown business that have reopened, although it's not a complete list:

Longs, Stepick's camera store, Van's Shoes, most of the shops in La Manzana, Norm's Shoe Service, Esperanza Cafe, Goodwill, Ideal Cleaners, Taylor's Office Supply and the Miramar Grill.

Zarko Radich, co-owner of Jack's Cigar Store, behind Jansen Music, moved the store temporarily to his garage, just a few feet from the store. Radich said business is down, but people are still coming in. Because of the quake, Radich cancelled a celebration for the store's 75th anniversary. The store was started on Main Street by Jack Novcich, now 101, the uncle of Radich's wife.

Jay Dien, assistant director of construction for F.W. Woolworth Co. in Burlingame, said, "We want to get in there (the Watsonville store) as soon as possible" so the damage can be cleaned up and the store reopened.

Dien said the Woolworth building is solid, but there are questions about adjoining buildings which is delaying the Woolworth reopening.

The city was scheduled to let Woolworth's people into the store today for a limited time, Dien said, to get a look at what damage was done to merchandise.

Another merchant waiting to reopen is Dick Young, owner of Lazy Days Casuals for Men at 428 Main St.

"The moment the city gives the OK, we'll start to operate," Young said, adding that there was no damage to his inventory. "We didn't lose a necktie," he said.

Some businesses have already found new quarters, either on a temporary or permanent basis.

Ford's Department Store, which was the largest business in downtown Watsonville, opened its temporary store yesterday in a 20,000-square-foot spot in the Westridge Business Park, on South Green Valley Road near the freeway.

Hal Hyde, Ford's senior vice president, said the first day went reasonably well "considering the magnitude" of the earthquake's effect. The store will maintain its normal hours of 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Hyde said. The store will stay open until 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Dr. James Taylor, who had a chiropractic office downtown, is now working out of the Freedom Chiropractic Clinic, at 2034 Freedom Blvd., and is negotiating for a spot in the Pajaro Hill Shopping Center, at Main Street and South Green Valley Road.

Dick Bruhn's clothing store and Jolley's Jewelers, both dam-

aged in the quake, were already planning to move to the Crossroads Shopping Center later this fall.

Others who have relocated from downtown include Bob Gross Travel, to 44 Brennan Street, Johnson Drug Co., to 21 Brennan St., and Horsnyder's Pharmacy, to a new permanent spot in the Lucky Shopping Center.

Finding a vacant spot for a retail store in Watsonville isn't easy.

Glenn Kramer, a partner in Burgstrom-Kramer real estate, said "there wasn't that much" retail space before the earthquake.

Kramer said there's office space available around town, but not much for those in small offices. Kramer said he doesn't know of any landlords who have raised office or retail rents. "People I know are bending over backwards" to accommodate tenants, he said.

Ron Gonzales, owner of Gonzales Jeweler, in the 300 block of Main Street, said his building is scheduled for demolition and he's looking for a new location, preferably in downtown Watsonville. "I haven't found one yet," he said.

Doug Kaplan, co-owner of Watsonville Square Shopping Center, said he's received several inquiries for the 11,421 square feet he has available in the center.

Kaplan said he's also had a number of inquiries since the earthquake about the vacant restaurant building in the front of Watsonville Square. Those who called were too late, because Jose Espinoza, who was operating the Mexican restaurant in the Palomar Hotel in Santa Cruz, had made arrangements before the earthquake to take the spot.

The restaurant will be known as Cilantro's and open around the first of the year, Kaplan said.

Larry Brindley, who bought Zuñiga's restaurant at 1047 Freedom Blvd., doesn't know the fate of the building yet. Brindley, who was leasing the building, said he's looking for a new location, preferably in Watsonville.

Hit-run victim dies of injuries

A 64-year-old Watsonville man died yesterday afternoon after being struck by a vehicle downtown earlier in the day.

Watsonville police said Angel Gonzalez Hernandez suffered a heart attack, injuries to his head and face, and a fractured pelvis after a silver American-made vehicle reportedly ran into him