

EARTHQUAKE WATSONVILLE -- REBUILDING

Hospital 6-15-90 expects MER-NE to rebuild

By Bob Johnson

Special to the Mercury News

Watsonville Community Hospital expects to build a new facility rather than continue the expensive logistical nightmare of repairing its earthquake-damaged building one section at a time while continuing to use it as a hospital.

During the estimated five to seven years it will take to complete a new building, Watsonville Community will continue to serve patients at its Green Valley Road site. Once the new facility is ready, the old building will be repaired and converted to another use, most likely a skilled nursing facility.

"The governmental agencies are looking favorably at financing a new hospital," said Watsonville Community Vice President Barbara Shanghai. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the state Office of Emergency Services are expected to formally announce this month that they will pay the \$40 million cost of a new building.

The decision to build a new hospital came after Watsonville Community learned that shifting operations throughout the first floor as different sections were repaired would make rehabilitation a five-year project costing as much as a new building.

Selecting the site for the new hospital could prove politically difficult. Watsonville Community already owns land adjacent to its building, but the land is zoned for commercial agriculture and is under the jurisdiction of the environmentally oriented Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors. The hospital also owns land on Soquel Avenue in the Aptos area.

Because Watsonville Community will still own its damaged building after the state and federal governments finance construction of a new building, the hospital could benefit from its earthquake nightmares.

Shanghai said the hospital has no estimates on the cost of repairing its building once it is vacated. But last month, Watsonville Community Chief Executive Officer Paul Estess said, "If this building were shut down, it could be repaired for maybe \$5 million or \$6 million."