

# High school's main building to close

By EMILIO ALVARADO  
STAFF WRITER

The Pajaro Valley school district board of trustees voted unanimously last night to close the main building at Watsonville High School.

For most of the trustees, yesterday's early-morning cluster of earthquakes left no doubt in their minds that the building, which was severely damaged in the Oct. 17 quake, should be off limits to students and staff.

"This morning's earthquakes convinced me," board member Carlos Rico said at last night's meeting, which was held at Alianza Elementary School.

At a trustees' study session at Mar Vista Elementary School last week, a structural engineer's report indicated that the building, which is named the 1917 Building for the year it was built, was unsafe and recommended it be evacuated as soon as possible. The trustees decided then to allow students and staff members to remain in the building until portable units on school grounds were made ready.

But yesterday's 14 earthquakes, six of which measured at least 4.0 on the Richter scale, made it clear to board members that the building had to shut immediately. Maintenance workers at the school yesterday reported that several pieces of plaster had fallen from the ceiling on the second floor.

The building was empty yesterday morning, because the district is having its spring break this week. But if people had been in the building, they could have been injured by falling debris or in a panic to get out of the building, officials believe.

Teachers and administrators will be notified today of the board's decision and will be asked to report to the school as soon as possible to start moving their materials out. Tony Calvo, principal at the school, said he might have the staff move into

## Superintendent says goodbye

For Pajaro Valley school district superintendent Jim Baker, last night's board of trustees meeting was the end of his era.

It was his last meeting before leaving office at the end of the month after 10 years at the post. He said he had been attending board meetings since 1972.

"It's been 540 meetings," he said. "I don't know whether that's a record or not. You either have to be a masochist or an optimist."

"I'm going to miss the action, at least a little bit," he said.

Baker received several citations and gifts from school officials and elected officials, such as Watsonville Mayor Todd McFarren and County Supervi-

sor Robley Levy.

Levy's voice filled with emotion as she thanked Baker for all the work he had done for the school district. Levy, whose three children attended Pajaro Valley district schools, said Baker had led the struggle for progressive education and equally progressive policies.

Levy declared April 18, 1990, as Jim Baker Day.

Baker, too, became emotional as he recalled his early days as a teacher in district schools.

"It's not easy for me to say goodbye," he said. "I'll always remember those little brown eyes in the classrooms." Baker has worked for the district for

about 30 years, starting as a sixth-grade teacher at the E.A. Hall School.

He decided to leave his post to run for superintendent of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. He is joined in the race by Diane Siri, who is the county's assistant superintendent for the educational services, and Richard Bristow, a real estate developer from Santa Cruz. The election will be held June 5.

Merrill Grant, who was at the meeting last night, was hired last month to replace Baker. Grant, 53, has been an administrator and teacher since the 1950s.

—Emilio Alvarado

the cafeteria temporarily until a portable unit can be set up.

Students will not be allowed to go in the building on Monday morning, but notices will be placed on the doors directing them to alternate classrooms. Calvo said some makeshift classrooms could be located in the library, the gymnasium, or the cafeteria. Some smaller classes could even be doubled up, he said.

The building houses 12 classrooms, administrative offices, and counseling and career centers. School officials plan to have 12 mobile units for classrooms and eight for administration personnel.

There are six units at the school now, with six more to come within the next few days. Officials said all 12 units could be ready in about a week. The ones for administration might take longer. It is estimated that it could take as much as six weeks to get the units delivered and set up for use.

The district's insurance agent, Ed Banks, had more bad news

for school officials. He said representatives for Industrial Indemnity, the San Diego-based insurance company that provides coverage for all of the district's schools, have told him their company will not provide additional coverage for the main building, but also would not retract part of the currency policy.

While the insurance company would not reduce the existing level of coverage, it could not, however, guarantee it would pay damages if the district were to be sued by someone who was injured in the building.

Banks said that because district officials were notified last week of the unsafe condition of the building and continued to allow people to go into the structure, they could be held liable if someone were injured there. But he assured the board that the insurance company would try to provide compensation in such a case.

"They're not going to try to weasel out of a claim," Banks said.

But talk about insurance cov-

erage and suits did not necessarily interest trustee Steve Knego.

"I am still upset that we are putting things in front of people," he said. "Students should be more important."

As of today, only authorized personnel can go in the building. Yesterday afternoon, structural engineers completed tests on the interior walls. Those test results will be made available next week, along with cost estimates for repairing the building or constructing another one.

Last week the engineers conducted tests on the exterior walls and found severe structural damage that had not been noticed in an earlier inspection that was completed in January.

The latest inspection discovered that the concrete that was used in the building was of poor quality and does not meet minimum standards. The engineers also found major support areas had been weakened by the Oct. 17 quake. That quake also made the second floor of the building separate from the ground floor, the report said.