

Chamber pulls Watsonville air show out of nosedive

Pajaro Valley businesses tentatively agree to sponsor the annual fly-in

By **KAREN CLARK**
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WATSONVILLE — Wings of History has officially pulled out of the city's annual air show, but local officials already have their sights fixed on a new sponsor. "If we're successful in what we're attempting, the public won't notice a differ-

ence," said Don French, manager of the Watsonville Municipal Airport. French said the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce tentatively has agreed to co-sponsor the West Coast Antique Fly-in and Air Show, a Memorial Day Weekend tradition in Watsonville for 34 years. Bob Dwyer, executive director of the

chamber, has been polling members for two days to determine if there is support for taking on the large project on such short notice. An official decision hasn't been announced. French said several Wings of History members familiar with the air show already have volunteered to help run this year's event to make the transition a smooth one. In the meantime, said Gayle Womack, executive director of Wings of History, her group will be gearing up for a Father's Day Weekend air show at Moffett Field in Mountain View.

The group's decision to move the show to June 19-20 means the new Watsonville sponsors won't have to reschedule the local event to the Fourth of July, which had been contemplated as a way not to compete with each other. Womack said the move to Moffett Field will allow Wings of History the elbow room it needs to expand the show. That's an important factor for the group, which is trying to raise more money to expand and update its aviation museum in San Martin. The airport's size wasn't the only problem, Womack said.

"The issue in Watsonville was we were landlocked," she said. "When we started, there weren't so many Memorial Day festivals going on as there are now. There are so many on Memorial Day now, it's almost impossible to get over Highway 17 or 152." That has put a lid on attendance, said Womack, noting that last year's gate receipts actually dipped. French said he hopes the Watsonville show will be the same size as last year, which drew some 20,000 people to see about 600 antique, neo-classic, military and homebuilt aircraft.