

Earthquake: Story of the decade and the century

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The major news story in Santa Cruz for 1989, the decade of the 1980s and, perhaps, for all of the 20th century, began at 5:04 p.m., Oct. 17.

It has yet to end.

Oct. 17 was the day the earth shook in a way that Santa Cruz County and the rest of the Central California region hadn't seen since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Seven people died in Santa Cruz County in just a few seconds.

Hundreds more were injured.

Hundreds of homes and businesses along with the dreams of lifetimes were destroyed as a pall of dust and smoke rose above the Pajaro Valley.

Fires raged in scattered locations throughout the county, with mobile homes burning in the Watsonville area, homes ablaze in the Midcounty and Santa Cruz areas, and a forest in flames in the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

Highway 17 between Scotts Valley and Los Gatos was closed by several large landslides. Highway

1 through Watsonville was also closed when the bridges over Struve Slough collapsed.

Highways 152 and 9 remained open but they were covered with downed trees, boulders and other quake-loosened debris.

Many county roads were closed as landslides thundered down from the hillsides or the pavement split apart like ripe melons.

The entire county lost its electrical power within seconds after the quake began as PG&E power plants and substations sustained heavy damage.

Underground gas mains in Santa Cruz and Watsonville ruptured, sending clouds of natural gas up through the pavement.

Thousands of homeowners, worried about natural gas and water leaks in their homes, turned off their own utilities.

Telephone service was snarled as the existing telephone system quickly became overloaded by thousands of people trying to make telephone calls into and out of the county.

Water and sewer systems were damaged in some areas.

Hospitals and fire stations also suffered damage, with Watsonville Community Hospital and fire stations in Soquel, Freedom and Salpuedes clearing out portions of their buildings immediately after the earthquake.

Thousands were left homeless.

Millions of dollars in property damage occurred.

Virtually everyone living in Santa Cruz County was affected in one way or another — some severely, others in only peripheral ways.

Today, the demolition and the

rebuilding continues.

The impact on the cities and communities of Santa Cruz County is still hard to measure.

The downtowns of Watsonville and Santa Cruz lie in ruins with demolition still taking place in a few locations and repairs or rebuilding underway in others.

It will be months, if not years, before the two cities see the areas rebuilt.

The impact on people is far worse.

The Red Cross last week closed

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X Earthquake

Earthquake at a glance

Date: Oct. 17, 1989
Time: 5:04 p.m.
Magnitude: 7.1
Epicenter location: 3 miles north of Aptos Village
in the Forest of Nisene Marks state park

Deaths and injuries

Deaths in Santa Cruz County: 6
Shawn McCormick, 21
Robin Ortiz, 22
Catherine Treiman, 75
Elida Ortega, 44
Gary Phillips West, 41
Dale DeBenedetti, 27
Major injuries: 104
Minor injuries: 1,441

Homeless

Persons displaced: 2,000-3,000 (est.)
Nights spent in shelters: 36,804

Damage

Private losses: \$311,476,176
Public losses: \$56,244,122.8
TOTAL LOSS: \$367,720,298.80

Area-by-area damage

Capitola

Dwellings inspected 1,749
Businesses inspected 35
Dwellings destroyed 3
Dwellings with major damage 6
Mobilehomes with major damage 35
Businesses with major damage 8
Dwellings with minor damage 1,740
Mobilehomes with minor damage 74
Businesses with minor damage 27
Total damage estimate \$9,700,000

Scotts Valley

Dwellings inspected 507
Businesses inspected 72
Other structures 10
Dwellings destroyed 4
Dwellings with major damage 14

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its last disaster shelter in the county, sending 19 families who had been living at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds into local motels for the holidays.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency opened temporary mobile-home parks in Freedom and Pajaro and at the St. Francis School east of Watsonville to house many of the Pajaro Valley's poor families who were left homeless by the quake.

The figures are grim.

Besides the seven deaths in Santa Cruz County from the earthquake, 104 people were admitted to hospitals with major injuries and 1,441 had minor injuries treated by the county's three hospitals in the hours and days after the quake.

The latest countywide damage reports show that 640 houses throughout the county were destroyed. Also listed as destroyed were 32 mobile homes and 310 businesses.

Major damage — a classification that includes buildings with more than \$10,000 in damage — was sustained by 2,228 homes, 300 mobile home, 335 businesses and 257 other buildings.

Buildings with minor damage included 9,934 homes, 705 mobile homes and 1,280 businesses.

The total bill for damage to private property amounts to \$311,476,176, county officials now estimate.

Signs of normalcy returned slowly to the county as thousands of aftershocks — some barely noticeable but others registering in the 4 to 5 magnitude range — continued to be felt here.

Electrical power was restored to large areas of Santa Cruz County, including the residential areas of Watsonville, 24 hours after the quake hit. PG&E figures the damage throughout its Mission Trails region exceeds \$6.5 million.

Telephones were working in many parts of the county several hours after the Oct. 17 quake, but

slides and patching thousands of cracks in the roadway.

Engineers originally said the repairs to Highway 17 would cost \$20 million and take until mid-December.

But by using some innovative repair techniques, the job was finished three weeks early at a cost of \$5 million. The road was reopened to normal traffic at the beginning of the Thanksgiving holiday week.

Merchants began to put their affairs back in order in time for the opening of the Christmas shopping season.

In Santa Cruz, many of the shop owners on the Pacific Garden Mall moved into large tent-like structures called "pavilions," erected on city parking lots in the weeks before Thanksgiving.

In Watsonville, business owners scrambled for temporary space. Many moved into the Crossroads Shopping Center, and Ford's, the county's largest retailer, moved its merchandise in two locations — one at the Crossroads Shopping Center and the second in the nearby Westridge industrial park.

In downtown Watsonville, the Chamber of Commerce set up

keep in the initial incident period open until after the rainy season."

By doing so, local governments can ask the state and federal governments to pay most of the reconstruction costs for the quake-damaged public facilities.

The list includes roads, bridges, water lines, storm drains and sewer lines.

Much of the damage from the quake was either hidden on the initial damage survey or underestimated, said county senior engineer Tom Bolich.

"Sometimes we started out with a debris-removal estimate of \$20,000 and then found that the fissures extended back into the hillside and, suddenly, the estimate was \$100,000 or more," Bolich said.

"The latest computer printout shows that the damage to the county's locally maintained roads is about \$4 million. But with the addition of the Federal Aid Secondary (local roads built and maintained, in part, with federal highway funds), the total will probably reach \$8 million."

The Midcounty's sewer system was hard hit by the quake and some of the damage is still being

budget," Sanfillipo said.

Santa Cruz budget officials have promised a fiscal forecast in mid-January when, for example, the state knows how much sales tax was generated during the Christmas shopping season — always a big revenue generator for local government.

Until then, elected officials like Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors chairman Gary Patton are playing a waiting game.

"My sense is that it will have effects that will be with us into the 1990s," Patton said last week.

"In the meantime, what happens to the county budget?" Patton asked. "Our plans did not take into account an earthquake. There will be a lot of losses — programs where we will have to cut back.

"Looking further in the decade ahead, it seems obvious that we have to place a higher emphasis on land planning and seismic safety. If we are looking at one of these (7.1 magnitude) earthquakes every 10 years, then we are also looking at a major societal change. Our biggest challenge is to restore the economic vitality of the areas hit by the earthquake."

Watsonville, Patton added, may have a rougher time rebuilding its downtown area than Santa Cruz.

In Santa Cruz, there are few places available for businesses displaced from the Pacific Garden Mall to move.

Watsonville has pursued a policy of developing satellite shopping and business areas. Many of the downtown merchants simply picked up stakes and moved to the "suburbs" after the quake. Their relocation means that downtown landlords could have a rougher time attracting the capital they need to rebuild in the downtown area.

The other issue facing the counties and the cities is one of "affordable housing."

In Watsonville, many of those now homeless once lived in the city's cheaper housing. The high cost of safely rebuilding those homes may either deter many property owners — even with the lure of low-interest federal loans

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— Gary Patton

modular units to house some of the displaced merchants, even as demolition there continued.

What does the future hold?

No one is really sure. Plans to rebuild the quake-ravaged downtowns in both Watsonville and Santa Cruz are still in the embryonic stage. Repairs and reconstruction is going ahead in many areas of the county.

But in portions of the Santa Cruz Mountains, many residents have been told they can't rebuild their damaged homes until geol-

assessed. Some of the most-publicized breaks occurred in the East Cliff sewage transmission line.

Millions of gallons of raw sewage poured into Monterey Bay in the days after the quake as repair crews repaired one break after another on the line as it ran along the San Lorenzo River levee in Santa Cruz.

Sewer lines in the Live Oak were heavily damaged by the quake, with joints pulled apart. A massive sewage-pumping station next to Nehi Hill Road in Capitola

Other structures	10
Dwellings destroyed	4
Dwellings with major damage	14
Mobilehomes with major damage	14
Businesses with major damage	9
Other structures with major damage	1
Dwellings with minor damage	390
Mobilehomes with minor damage	92
Businesses with minor damage	53
Other structures with minor damage	7
Total estimated damage	Not available

Santa Cruz

Dwellings inspected	1,856
Businesses inspected	200
Other structures inspected	50
Dwellings destroyed	40
Mobilehomes destroyed	0
Businesses destroyed	205
Other structures destroyed	187
Dwellings with major damage	740
Mobilehomes with major damage	0
Businesses with major damage	211
Others with major damage	0
Dwellings with minor damage	740
Mobilehomes with minor damage	0
Businesses with minor damage	211

Total damage estimate \$75,100,000

Watsonville

Dwellings Inspected	6,254
Businesses inspected	1,107
Other structures	58
Dwellings destroyed	237
Mobilehomes destroyed	4
Businesses destroyed	95
Other structures destroyed	6
Dwellings with major damage	405
Mobilehomes with major damage	N.A.
Businesses with major damage	108
Other structures with major damage	5
Dwellings with minor damage	5,612
Mobilehomes with minor damage	206
Businesses with minor damage	904
Other structures with minor damage	47

Total estimated damage \$60,803,716

Unincorporated area

Dwellings inspected	3,777
Businesses inspected	300
Other structures	191
Dwellings destroyed	356
Mobilehomes destroyed	28
Businesses destroyed	10
Other structures destroyed	5
Dwellings with major damage	1,653
Mobilehomes with major damage	251
Businesses with major damage	163
Other structures with major damage	34
Dwellings with minor damage	1,452
Mobilehomes with minor damage	333
Businesses with minor damage	85
Other structures with minor damage	63

Total estimated damage \$144,637,738

(Source: Santa Cruz County Administrator's Office)

damage throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains region exceeds \$6.5 million.

Telephones were working in many parts of the county several hours after the Oct. 17 quake, but the system remained overloaded for several weeks afterward while Pacific Bell crews made more than \$1 million in repairs.

But Highway 17 remained closed, forcing thousands of Santa Cruz and other area residents who commuted daily over-the-hill to make other arrangements.

Many found themselves spending hours on Highway 9 or driving north or south along the coast to other trans-mountain crossings.

Some decided to ride a short-lived CalTrain commuter special that ran for three weeks from Salinas to Watsonville and San Jose.

Others joined carpools and rode public transit when state highway engineers opened Highway 17 to limited traffic even while construction crews began clearing

But in portions of the Santa Cruz Mountains, many residents have been told they can't rebuild their damaged homes until geologists are able to say that their land is safe to occupy. And, in many cases, that assurance won't be given until after the county has received substantial rainfall — something that hasn't happened since the earthquake.

Engineers are still waiting for the rain to begin to fall so they can fully assess the damage to the county's road network.

Phil Sanfillipo, the county's assistant public works director, said it will probably take between 18 months and two years to repair all of the quake-caused damage to county roads.

"We are afraid that, as these cracks get lubricated with rainwater," Sanfillipo said, "there will be additional instability.

"So we are pressing hard to

Sewer lines in the Live Oak were heavily damaged by the quake, with joints pulled apart. A massive sewage-pumping station next to Nob Hill Foods in Capitola will need an estimated \$350,000 in repairs, because the ground underneath the station liquefied during the quake.

Altogether, the damage to the county's wastewater-collection system will total more than \$1.1 million, engineers estimate.

Cash flow is a major problem.

The federal and state governments have promised to pay upward of 100 percent of the quake damage repair costs. But the money is sometimes slow in coming, Sanfillipo said. And, when all the bills are added up, there are costs that neither the federal nor state governments are willing to pay — leaving the county or the cities stuck with the bill.

"A disaster does not help your

city's cheaper housing. The high cost of safely rebuilding those homes may either deter many property owners — even with the lure of low-interest federal loans — or simply raise the rents so high that their former tenants have to look elsewhere.

The same situation exists in Santa Cruz, but with an added problem — the elderly. Hundreds of senior citizens were left homeless when the quake caused severe damage to three residential hotels — the St. George, the Palomar and the Casa del Rey.

A housing task force has been looking for places for many of these seniors to live. Options include a mobile-home park on the UC-Santa Cruz campus and reopening one or two closed convalescent homes in the Santa Cruz area.

"It will take the rest of the decade to solve these problems," Patton said.