

# Rebuilding a Victorian

## Sisters and home survived the earthquake

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**S**INCE OCT. 17, the Kennedys have struggled to save a part of their family heritage.

Six months ago today, the Oct. 17 earthquake left the three Kennedy sisters—all in their 60s and 70s—homeless. For weeks, their Victorian home in Watsonville was left leaning precariously 3 feet off its foundation, a red tag on the front door announcing the home had been condemned.

Today, the home has been completely gutted. It has a new concrete foundation, and craftsmen are working to preserve the historical details.

"It's going to be back the way it was," said Bill Gonzales, the contractor hired to reconstruct the home. "They're getting everything back."

Six months ago the Kennedys weren't sure if they'd ever step back into their childhood home. Now they plan to move back into the refurbished home by the end of May.

All in all, the Kennedys have fared far better than many who watched their homes crumble during the Oct. 17 earthquake.

The Kennedys were one of the first homeowners to begin reconstruction back in December. By then, they had already received a 30-year FEMA grant for \$78,400 at a 4-percent interest rate, and they had hired a contractor to start pouring the new foundation.

Since then, they've been living in a home five miles from town that they rent with FEMA vouchers. In addition, they've received a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for \$2,500.



Photos by Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Restoring their historic home after the earthquake has been a great challenge for Mary and Zalia Kennedy, and their contractor.

Mary and Zalia Kennedy moved into the Jefferson Street home in 1928 when they were children. Mary has lived in the home ever since. Anna is Mary and Zalia's sister-in-law. She married Hughes Kennedy, the elder Kennedy brother, and moved in with Mary when he died.

The effort to preserve the home has been partly out of the Kennedys' nostalgia for the past and partly a practical decision.

"I have strong emotional ties," said Anna Kennedy. "The nieces and nephews and my own children were very upset about it. All the holidays everyone would get together at the house."

"I didn't think we could ever rebuild," said Mary. "The home was just destroyed."

"I said let's move into a condo," said Zalia. "I didn't plan my retirement around rebuilding a house. I had hoped to be traveling around Europe."

**T**HE Kennedy home sits at the corner of Jefferson and East Fifth streets, the heart of the residential area hit hardest by the Oct. 17 earthquake in Watsonville. Nearly every home on Jefferson, Lincoln and East Fifth streets sustained similar major damage.

All three of the Kennedys were at home when the earthquake struck.

"I saw the plaster coming down and I ran outside," said Anna. They spent that first night in front of the home in their car. With the doors broken, they were afraid of looting. The home was filled with family heirlooms.

The Kennedys spent the first month after the earthquake living with Anna's daughter in Hollister. It was in Hollister that they applied for the FEMA loan.

"We were very lucky," said Zalia. "There was no trouble. In Hollister there were no lines."

"At our age, we'll never live to pay it off," said Anna, about the 30-year loan. "I intend to ... after all this work," said Mary.

**M**ANY OF the homeowners and property owners in Watsonville moved quickly to repair their homes. Only a small percentage of the homes—less than 35—are scheduled for demolition, despite the fact that the earthquake destroyed or caused major damage to hundreds of homes in the city.

"The older homes tended to suffer more damage," said Marilyn McLachlan, president of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association.

McLachlan helped the Kennedy sisters apply for a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for the Victorian home which was built around 1890.

In all, 37 grants at a total of \$75,000 were given out to the seven county area affected by the quake. The National Trust received requests for \$200,000. There were a number of grants to homes, businesses, and public agencies in both Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

The St. George Hotel in Santa Cruz received a grant along with the Watsonville Woman's Club, and the Pajaro Valley Historical Association was awarded a grant to help out St. Patrick's Catholic Church, according to Courtney Damkroger, field representative for National Trust.

"It's just sickening when you see what's gone down," said Anna, who is on the board of the Watsonville historical association. "I was born in this town and raised in this town and you just feel bad." The Kennedy fam-

ily has lived in Watsonville for three to four generations.

**C**ONSULTANT and family friend Ron Gordon initially came up with the plan to save the Kennedy home. He designed an elaborate foundation that includes the outline for the bay window that survived the quake. Then he inspected the interior and discovered that most of the damage to the inside was cosmetic.

"There were quite a few homes that they said couldn't be saved," said Gonzales, the contractor. "Once the movers lifted them up and straightened them up, we found you could save quite a few."

Gonzales said he's working on three Victorians that were red-tagged after the earthquake. His estimates showed that refurbishing the homes should cost half of what it would cost to tear them down and rebuild.

The cost of rebuilding for the Kennedys should run close to \$80,000, said Gonzales. He's made an effort to preserve the wood borders in the home, the wainscoting in the kitchen, the antique leaded windows, even the old-style texture of the walls.

In addition there will be a few improvements. For the first time, the water heater will be moved out of the kitchen; there will be heat throughout the house and the back-porch refrigerator will finally be moved into the kitchen.

"I think we're coming along real well here," said Anna.



Mary and Zalia Kennedy count the days til they can move back into their 100-year-old Watsonville home.