

# Jobless line up for aid

By GREG BEEBE  
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SANTA CRUZ — Employers and employees lined up side by side Wednesday at the state Employment Development Department, hoping to find some financial relief in the aftermath of the Oct. 17 earthquake.

An estimated 4,000 workers in the county have lost their jobs as a result of the 7.1 earthquake. Many worked for restaurants, shops and offices in downtown Santa Cruz, where 324 businesses have been closed.

Persons who are unemployed as a result of the quake are eligible for state and federal unemployment benefits, said Barbara Babcock, director of the Santa Cruz EDD office.

The Santa Cruz office processed 250 claims Monday and 300 more Tuesday. Officials expect the office to process an estimated 300 claims a day for another two weeks.

A long line of would-be claimants snaked out the door of the EDD office on Soquel Avenue Wednesday morning.

Heather Murphy of Santa Cruz had two jobs before the quake — at Cafezinho and the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Co. — and she lost both of them.

"This is my first trip down here," she said. "Hopefully, I'll be able to fill out some forms and get some money so I can pay my bills. I wish they were a little more prepared for all these people, though," Murphy said.

The crowd was not limited to jobless employees.

"I own Pacific Pack & Pants, and I'm in the unemployment line," said merchant Kim Baskett.

"If you need the money, you need the money," she said. "I don't have any money to put a down payment on new place. In fact, people from all over are sending me money, and my landlady halved my rent," Baskett said.

Pacific Pack and Pants employed

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five people at the time of the quake "and they're all just like me," Baskett said. "The longer you stay closed, the more business you lose. It's very scary for a business owner. ... It's hard to have something one day and then 15 seconds later it's all gone," Baskett said.

Restaurant workers were also hit hard.

Chris Hargens of Santa Cruz worked for El Palomar restaurant in the now-closed Palomar Hotel. His wife Marta worked at the Bubble Cafe. Both were lined up outside the EDD Wednesday.

"They expect El Palomar to open again," Chris Hargens said. "The owners are looking for another restaurant — they're planning on getting something going," he said.

"It seems like almost everybody here is from the mall," Marta Hargens said. "To be honest I don't

know when I'll be able to go back to work. There's so much confusion," she said.

In the meantime, the couple will try to make ends meet with unemployment benefits, which roughly amount to half of a worker's regular pay.

"I don't know if it's going to cover my bills, but it's something," Chris Hargens said.

Sue Harris lost both her job and her house.

"I'm hoping for something to help me out," she said. Her job at a sales office in San Jose went by the wayside because of the three-hour commute necessitated by the closure of Highway 17.

The EDD is processing both regular unemployment claims and federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance for business owners and workers who "worked for only a short time with no earnings in the base period," Babcock said.

EDD workers also are staffing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) "one-stop" centers in Ben Lomond and Santa Cruz. An EDD computer hookup at the Ben Lomond office was delayed a day because of technical problems. The terminal is now on-line.

The unemployment line, at least on Wednesday, was good-natured but slow.

"It's amazing," Babcock said. "People have been patient and understanding. I've had only one semi-irate person all week. People are coming in with great documentation," she said.

The local Job Training Partnership Act also has workers at the EDD office, 2200 Soquel Ave., to help workers find new jobs. Any employer looking for temporary or permanent workers may call 462-2300 or 479-8336 to place a job order.