

SJM 2/2/95 Felton - 1990

Community hall project in Felton slowed by rain

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Winter rains have slowed construction crews rebuilding the Felton Community Hall but not dampened the enthusiasm of volunteers working to replace the former town center.

The San Lorenzo Valley town has been without a community center since the original Felton Community Hall was destroyed in an August 1990 fire. The wooden meeting hall, on Highway 9 in the

heart of downtown, had been used by several generations of Felton residents.

Although the planning to rebuild the center started the morning after the fire, it took more than four years before construction began. Castle Construction, a San Lorenzo Valley firm hired to do the work, broke ground on the project in September.

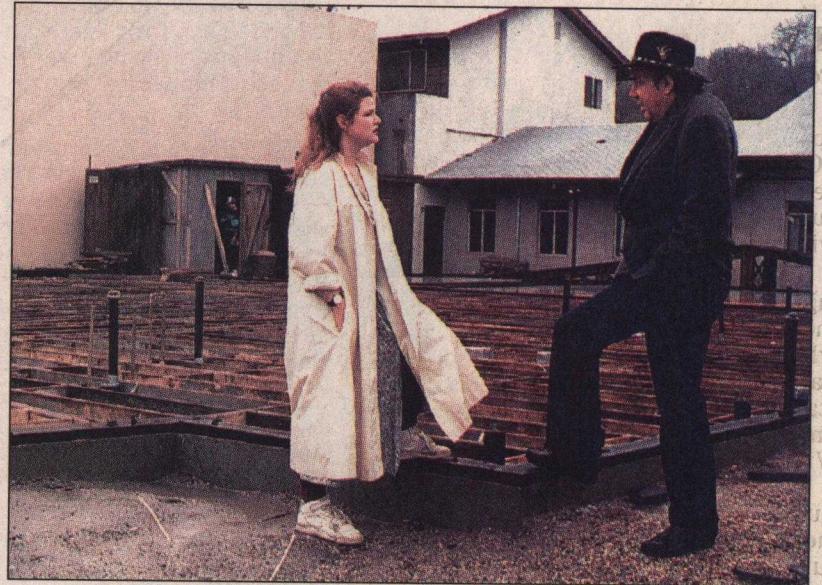
The rains have put construction about four weeks behind schedule, said Gene Martin, presi-

dent of the Felton Community Hall board of directors.

The foundation and exterior of the building — all the non-profit board can afford right now — should be finished by midsummer. Volunteers are trying to raise the \$200,000 needed to pay for the interior work.

Built in 1925, the original community hall hosted thousands of town dances, meetings, forums, weddings, benefits and auctions.

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Leah Frost and Gene Martin are involved in fund raising and planning for the new Felton Community Hall at Highway 9 and Kirby Street.

Lawsuit may help Felton pay for community hall

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Cheap to rent, the publicly owned building could accommodate several hundred people and was in use nearly every day.

"It was available for rental for any and every purpose in the past," Martin said. "It will be again."

The hall was built in a month by volunteers for \$5,500. People in the community chipped in and

hosted fund-raising suppers to pay for it. Dr. Jessie Farmer, who organized the project after World War I, envisioned it as a site where veterans could gather.

The replacement structure will cost nearly \$500,000. The rebuilding committee has collected about \$280,000, including nearly \$210,000 from its insurance company. The rest was donated by residents and merchants or raised by volunteers who sold beer and other goods at public gatherings throughout the valley.

Additional fund-raisers may not be necessary if the community hall board wins a settlement from its insurance company. Martin said a mediator is expected to make a decision this week regarding a lawsuit filed by the board in an effort to recover the full replacement cost for the building.

At 5,600 square feet, the new

structure will be slightly larger than the original. It will double as an emergency shelter during natural disasters.

Plans call for a separate auditorium and meeting room to allow two groups to use the building at the same time. Designed by architect Jeff Oberdorfer, the facility will be much more stylish than its

predecessor, which was charitably described as "functional."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Felton Community Hall board of directors meets at 7:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at the Felton Fire Department, 131 Kirby St.