

• SJM 5/15/92 B-1

EARTHQUAKE 1989 - CITY OF S.C.

Outpouring of cash after quake remains unspent

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

One of the more poignant events that followed the Loma Prieta earthquake in Santa Cruz was the outpouring of donations that flowed into City Hall from ordinary citizens across the world who wanted to lend a hand.

News footage of the Pacific Garden Mall ruins led an estimated 350 people to send money — from a \$200,000 check mailed by rock promoter Bill Graham to a simple note with 70 cents from a poor family in Alabama.

Now, two and a half years later, Santa

Cruz's earthquake relief fund is still sitting in a bank account, most of it unspent.

With interest, the total has grown to \$656,000.

The reason? City leaders say they never were quite sure what to spend it on — and still aren't.

"It's too bad that it's taken a while," said City Manager Dick Wilson on Thursday.

"There have been so many things to do, it's been overwhelming," he said. "We've wanted to come up with a consistent and fair use for it — things just needed to settle out a little."

Wilson and members of the city council say they wanted to hold onto the money until they knew how much of the total \$20 million in city rebuilding costs would be covered by outside agencies such as the Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Much of that outside money has only recently come to Santa Cruz because of lengthy application procedures.

"We didn't want to spend it on projects like housing or the Riverside Bridge that federal funds might have covered," said Councilman Neal Coonerty.

Also, the money was being held in case

of cost overruns on the city's largest public project — the \$4.8 million "streetscape" job for new trees, sidewalks and roads downtown.

Now that the project is under way, and will be covered by funds from a county sales tax increase, Wilson is preparing a list of recommendations. He said it will be ready for city budget hearings June 15.

Many people feel that some of the money should be spent on a tangible project that visitors and locals can look to proudly for years.

"We've sensed that we want to have

See D

Outpouring of cash after quake is yet to be spent in Santa Cruz

■ DONATIONS from Page 1B

some sort of memorial to people within the town and people outside who've helped rebuild," said Coonerty. "We do want to remember them."

But that likely would only take a small part of the fund. Some other ideas being discussed:

■ Funding a project to retrofit the houses of Santa Cruzans who can't afford earthquake upgrades. The money could be matched with federal grants to bolt old houses to foundations and add plywood to prevent shear in future quakes.

■ Helping downtown merchants. Part of the money could be used to pay merchants' parking taxes during downtown construction. Another idea: Mail out

vouchers for discounts at downtown stores, then reimburse merchants from the fund.

■ Landscaping. The money could fund downtown landscaping that isn't included in the streetscape budget, such as buying planter boxes to be placed outside stores along Pacific Avenue.

Of the \$656,000 total, about \$110,000 already has been spent or committed. For example, \$40,000 went to set up and staff the Vision Santa Cruz office on Pacific Avenue; \$28,000 covered building costs for the emergency pavilion tents and \$20,000 was spent on downtown shopping promotions.

Old letters from donors are as moving as they are diverse. Cub Scout Pack #817 of Ellicott City, Md., sent \$200. The city of Shingu, Japan, sent \$16,000. Islands Elementary School of Gilbert, Ariz., mailed \$100.

"The money is the pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters that most children accumulated," wrote their teacher.

CALL US

Have a comment, question or story idea? Call the Santa Cruz Bureau at (408) 423-3234.

Or you can write the Mercury News, 750 Ridder Park Drive, San Jose 95190.