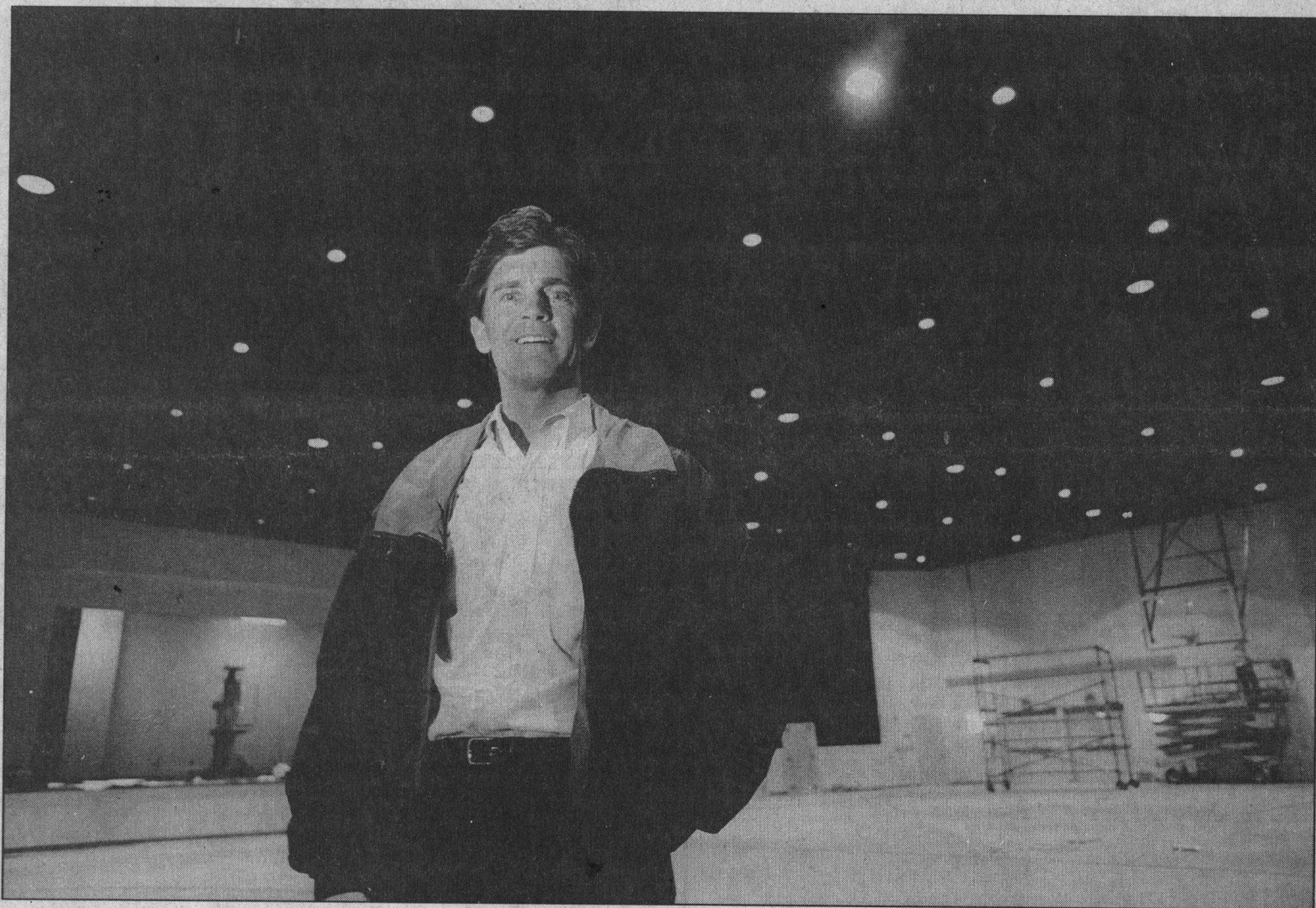


For the spirit ... and more

*The largest church built
in Santa Cruz County
in 20 years was designed
to serve many purposes
for its congregation*



Churches

Worship center opens Saturday

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

The largest church building constructed in Santa Cruz County in 20 years will open for services Saturday evening.

Church officials say the new 1,050 seat multi-purpose "worship center" at the Santa Cruz Bible Church was designed to serve more than just the spiritual needs of the church's congregation.

"We're really excited," said Steve Clifford, one of nine full-time pastors at the non-denominational church. "We're expecting more than 2,300 worshipers on the first weekend."

The worship center, which can double as a gymnasium, banquet room or theater hall when not being used for services, was



The new Santa Cruz Bible Church, left, can double as a gymnasium, banquet room, or theater hall when not being used for services. Chip Ingram, above, is chief pastor.

PATRICK TEHAN
— MERCURY NEWS

funded by members, who contributed nearly \$2 million for its construction over the past three years. The two-story building also houses several classrooms, a library, a resource center, commercial-sized kitchen and a nursery for young children. It is at Frederick Street and Broadway,

next to a cluster of buildings owned and used by the church for nearly 40 years.

"It's pretty un-churchy," Clifford said of the new worship center, which includes a regulation-size basketball court and state-of-the-art video and sound system.

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Worship center opens Saturday

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"Philosophically, we made a decision (during the planning phase) to make it a multipurpose building. We want it used every day, not just on weekends."

The new building also will make it easier for the church to host the dozens of meetings, activities and programs it runs each week for men, women, teens and young children in the community, he added.

The church has a long history in Santa Cruz County. Founded as the First Christian Church of Santa Cruz in 1884, the church was officially chartered by the state in 1896. Two years later the congregation, which had been meeting in the YMCA and other borrowed buildings, erected a church at Lincoln and Church streets in downtown Santa Cruz.

In 1950, the church purchased acreage at the present site on Frederick Street and opened a center there in 1957.

Membership began dwindling in the early 1980s. In 1983, after pastor John Heberling resigned, an average of 75 people would show up on weekends for services. Then, slowly at first, people began returning, officials said.

In 1987, the church was renamed the Santa Cruz Bible Church. By the end of the decade, membership had increased to more than 1,000. To accommodate them all, church officials had to knock down a wall at the rear of the old worship center to expand the room, and schedule multiple services. Later, church officials moved Sunday services to the gymnasium at Harbor High School and held holiday pageants at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.

"We're not sure why it (the growth) all happened," Clifford said. "We have to give the credit to the Lord; we don't understand what's going on."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For more information on the Santa Cruz Bible Church, call (408) 429-1162.