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Businesses fear economic aftershocks

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Santa Cruz County businesses that survived the Oct. 17 earthquake may still be facing economic disaster if business does not pick up soon.

Local chambers of commerce are working hard not only to relocate businesses displaced by the quake, but to drum up customers for merchants throughout the county. The flood of emergency workers into the county has helped alleviate the economic hardship on some businesses, but merchants fear their business may leave with those workers.

Carin Mudgett, owner of The Craft Gallery in Capitola Village, said the majority of her business in these post-quake days has come from relief workers such as firefighters, structural engineers and PG&E employees brought in from other areas of the state, but it's difficult to tell the exact effect those workers' patronage is having on business.

"We don't know," she said. "It's definitely distorting it. If it weren't for those sales, we

wouldn't be making any money at all."

T-shirts bearing slogans like "I survived the earthquake" are hot sellers right now, Mudgett said. Money from the shirts is being donated to Food and Nutrition Services, so she's not making anything on them, but emergency workers are also buying other items from her shop for souvenirs.

In Watsonville, the chamber has been busy trying to relocate businesses, said Jeannie El-dracher, special projects coordinator for the Watsonville Area Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture. Watsonville businesses have a different clientele from the rest of the county, she said.

"Most of the businesses in Watsonville are supported by local (people)," she said. "It's not a tourist town."

The Watsonville chamber will be running updated lists of businesses' new locations in the Register-Pajaronian beginning next week, she said, and has established a Business Earthquake

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Area Relief Fund. Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 470, Watsonville 95077 or more information can be obtained by calling 1-800-347-6855.

The Aptos Chamber is working to help relocate Aptos businesses, and local chambers plan to mount a campaign to encourage those county residents who can afford to buy Christmas presents this year to shop at home, chamber director Karen Hibble said.

"When you had no batteries and you had no water and you had no blankets, you went to your local store," Hibble said. "They were there for you. And now they need you back."

Merchants must also find ways to get word to outside communities that, contrary to popular belief, Santa Cruz County was not flattened by the quake and is still an enjoyable place to visit, Toni Castro, executive director of the Capitola Chamber of Commerce, said.

"It's not just Capitola," she said. "We want people to come to the entire county. We want Santa Cruz to be rebuilt. We want Watsonville to be rebuilt."

Some businesses are already feeling the crunch from the lack of out-of-town visitors. Ted Burke, owner of the Shadowbrook and Crow's Nest restaurants, said the restaurants were open the weekend after the quake, but business was so slow they've had to cut back.

Shadowbrook is now closed Monday and Tuesday nights, 15 people have been laid off and work shifts have been reduced, Burke said. In addition, five other employees have resigned to move to busier areas such as ski resorts because "they know that their economic future is bleak."

Marq Lipton, director of marketing for the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, said the Seaside Company was trying to figure out how to keep all its employees, but there could be some layoffs down the road. The Seaside Company suffered between \$1 million and \$1.5 million in damage and 43 people lost their jobs when the Casa del Rey sustained serious structural damage and closed.

Lipton said the Seaside Company was trying to find other jobs within the company for those people.

Members of the Santa Cruz Chamber and the Santa Cruz Downtown Association are also discussing relocating businesses temporarily in tents, Santa Cruz businessman John Lisher said. Several buildings, including the old jail, are also being considered.

Santa Cruz merchants have been too busy trying to relocate and to remove inventories from damaged mall buildings, Lisher said, to attend a chamber meeting held in Capitola this week to discuss economics. Entities such as the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council, however, have been discussing how to promote business, which is a very real concern for Santa Cruz as well as for other communities, he said.

A chamber mixer for earthquake-stricken businesses throughout the county, called "Business Helping Business," is scheduled for Friday from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Jade Street Park Community Center in Capitola, said Castro, of the Capitola chamber.

A representative from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, counselors and mental-health professionals will be on hand, and other information will concentrate on taxes, insurance and job placement, Castro said. Unlike the usual mixer, no food or wine will be served; it's strictly an opportunity for information, she said.

Lipton, of the Seaside Company, said the Boardwalk will open Nov. 4 and 5 from noon to 5 p.m. with all money generated donated to earthquake relief. It will be promoted only to county residents and the only tickets sold will be unlimited ride tickets, which will go for \$5 rather than the usual \$13.95. Free parking will be offered in the large Beach Street lot, Lipton said.

Rides from the Loggers Revenge south to the river will be closed because of damage to the walkway, and the miniature golf course will be closed indefinitely, Lipton said. The Coconut Grove is opening tomorrow night for private parties and will be open for Sunday brunch.