

Stores, businesses beginning to reopen

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Businesses and residents in Watsonville were gamely trying to resume a semblance of normal life today.

The closest approximation of business-as-usual was achieved at Longs Drugs on Rodriguez Street, where even the Lotto computer was back in action.

Immaculate crepe-paper Halloween decorations were strung from the ceiling. Remarkably, there were no lines to speak of at any of the three checkout counters open. The store had both batteries and drinking water in stock at 8 a.m. this morning.

The return to normalcy required a herculean effort, said Glen Evett, second assistant manager.

"We had 25 people in from other stores," Evett said, displaying Polaroid photos of the wreckage and debris that confronted store workers immediately after Tuesday evening's quake.

Across town at Orchard Supply Hardware on the corner of Green Valley Road and Main Street, officials from the chain-store's San Jose corporate office were donning hard-hats before entering the store to help clean up.

A corporate official who refused to give his name said the store hoped to open for business in the parking lot at 9 a.m. with limited supplies of items such as batteries and water.

Across the street in Watsonville Square shopping center, PayLess drugs was also planning to open a small concession in the parking lot.

"We'll have water, batteries, baby milk, disposable diapers, and that sort of thing," said assistant manager Larry Mead.

Prescriptions may also be filled at PayLess, Mead said. East Lake Pharmacy on East Lake Avenue is also open for the filling of prescriptions only, as it was yesterday, said a worker in the store there.

At Freedom Centre, Albertson's clerks were accepting shopping lists from customers in the parking lot and scurrying into the store to fill them.



Mike McCollum

Long lines formed yesterday at Longs Drugstore, one of the few places open in downtown Watsonville.

A sense of good-feeling and helpfulness pervaded the Albertson's line, where clerks were unfailingly polite to customers.

Customers were limited to two gallons of water and one bag of charcoal each.

The fresh milk had all spoiled, but the store expected a new shipment of it to arrive today, a clerk said.

Joan Meyers, a resident of Alta Vista Avenue, said she was in line to buy bread for six elderly

neighbors.

"Everybody has pulled together wonderfully," Meyers said. "All the neighbors got together and cooked (their perishable food), and shared it. Somebody was able to get cases of water and divided them up among the neighbors."

Albertson's was the only store doing business in Freedom Centre. A worker carrying debris out of K-mart described the interior of the store as "thrashed." He said the store was supposed to reopen Sunday.

Through the store's cracked front windows, the interior looked to be a chaos of fallen ceiling tiles and merchandise.

Among the town's largest markets, Fairway Mart in East Lake shopping center appeared to be the only other one readying for business today.

A sign in Fairway Mart's window read "Open maybe 9:30-10 a.m." At 9 a.m., a line of 20 people had already formed at the door.

The store appeared to be in

good order, apart from stripped freezer compartments and bare patches on some shelves.

Other small shops around town have also managed to reopen.

The only bank this reporter saw open in a survey of the town was Pacific Western in Watsonville Square. The bank will serve its own account-holders only, said teller Mary Jo Silva. Cash withdrawals will be limited to \$100 per customer, she said.

"We don't know when we'll be

able to get more money," Silva said.

As for which gas stations are open, ye shall know them by their lines. Generally those in intersections with functioning signal lights were open, as were those which managed to procure electrical generators to power their pumps. But those open are likely to run out of gas pretty quickly. A BP station that was open yesterday at Main Street and Riverside Drive was closed today, presumably because it had nothing left to sell.