

VCP Building APR 16 1994

Mello Center opening tonight

By JIM JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

State Sen. Henry Mello will take to the stage tonight, not to make a political speech, but to play the piano. He'll be there to officially open his namesake — the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts.

In addition to Mello, there will be as many as 15 different performing groups on hand to preview just what kind of entertainment will be showcased in the new, 800-seat theater.

The grand opening will begin at 8 p.m. at the Mello Center, which is in the new Watsonville High School building at East Beach and Lincoln streets. Tickets are \$5, and are available at Alcala Insurance, 540 Main St., and Rapid Offset Printing, 22 East Lake Ave., in Watsonville. A limited number of tickets will also be available at the door.

Secure parking will be available at the City Parking Garage on Rodriguez Street, with a shuttle to

and from the Mello Center.

Mello, a Watsonville native and graduate of Watsonville High School, was instrumental in obtaining state funds to match funds set aside by the city of Watsonville from Measure E (Earthquake Rebuilding Funds) for the theater, according to Jan Berman, Pajaro Valley Performing Arts Association publicity chairwoman and event director.

The city contributed \$1.6 million toward the new theater, which will be used jointly by the city and the community under the auspices of the joint powers agency — a combination of the city, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the Pajaro Valley Performing Arts Association.

Designed by school district-designated architect Thang Do, of Porter Jensen architects in San Jose, the theater features fine acoustics, a full-sized stage and elevated orchestra pit, as well as a special rehearsal stage and classroom behind the main stage.

Though the theater has already hosted several events, beginning in February with a performance by Benjamin Verdery and Ufonia, tonight's grand opening is intended as a formal tribute to the Mello Center's namesake.

Mello will also be the guest of honor at an official dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony at 2 p.m. at the theater today.

From the opening performance of the Watsonville High band to the "Political Follies" finale featuring Sen. Mello, Congressman Sam Farr and Assemblyman Bruce McPherson, the event will run the entertainment gamut.

After the Watsonville High band gets things rolling, PVPAA president and former mayor Ann Soldo will welcome the audience and formally thank the many groups involved with the Mello Center opening.

Following Soldo's welcome, the first half of the entertainment schedule will include a Filipino Fi-

See MELLO / back of section ►

VCP BUILDING
APR 16 1994

MELLO

► From Page 1

esta Dance by a 40-member Watsonville Filipino Community group; a duet from Watsonville High's production of "West Side Story," featuring WHS drama students Andy Vargas and Rebecca Ventura; jazz vocalist Michelle Rivard performing the jazz version of "Hello Young Lovers" and "Stop Sitting Around Just Singing the Blues"; a performance by Watsonville Taiko; a barbershop music set from "Four Flights Up"; a modern dance duet with Sara Wilbourne and Jeff Williams of the Tandy Beal troupe; and original Mexican music by Eleazar Cortes.

After an intermission, the second half will include the Cabrillo Symphonic Chorus, under the direction of Cheryl Anderson; the Penny Club Band; operatic vocalist Kathleen Nitz, singing the aria *Depuis le jour* from "Louise" by Gustave Charpentier; gospel music from the Unity Gospel Choir, featuring Oscar Gillespie; local performers Brian Spencer and Geri Sauls, performing music from "Les Miserables"; and the Symphonic Brass Quintet.

Though the "Follies" program is being kept a secret, Mello is known as an accomplished jazz pianist and his accompanying bassist Kent Dedrick will be present.