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Youth center back on track

Boulder Creek teen facility to reopen this year

By Terri Morgan
Special to the Mercury News

The San Lorenzo Valley Youth Center is scheduled to reopen before the end of the year with a new name and a new Boulder Creek location.

"We're basically starting over," said director Barbara D'Ercole. "Hopefully we've learned from past mistakes."

Those mistakes, which ultimately led to the May closing of the 4-year-old drop-in center for San Lorenzo Valley teen-agers, were varied. Most stemmed, however, from disputes between volunteers and board members, and a lack of training for volunteers. Many of the volunteers resigned after they had trouble controlling a group of unruly youths who intimidated other teen-agers and heckled people visiting neighboring businesses in downtown Boulder Creek.

"The earthquake also hurt us a

lot," said D'Ercole. "Some key board members found their priorities shifted after their homes were severely damaged by the quake."

When the center's founders began fighting among themselves, all the members of the original board of directors resigned except for co-founder Stephanie Butler. Butler has been joined on the new board by six adults and two youths.

"We're still continuing to build the board," D'Ercole said. "We're hoping to have nine adults and three youths on it eventually."

The new board has developed a six-month plan, a new mission statement for the center, and has begun writing a grant proposal to submit to the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency. The agency had provided the center with \$30,000 in grants over the last three years.

The board's plans also include moving into a new location by the

end of October, hiring a coordinator to organize events by the end of November, and opening the center by the end of December.

The center will be open seven days a week on a drop-in basis, and will operate as a resource center as well as a recreation center. Materials will be available to help teens cope with problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. The paid coordinator and volunteer staff will also run activities, classes and seminars on topics such as ocean kayaking, volleyball, arts and crafts, and music.

"Instead of just having a place for kids to hang out, we're planning structured activities geared to the kinds of things kids like," said D'Ercole. "If we can find a volunteer instructor, we'll even have heavy metal guitar lessons."