

Aid, crowds flow to Watsonville

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Earthquake 1989 - Watsonville

WATSONVILLE — As more than a thousand people here faced another night in a shelter or a tent city Sunday, thousands of others cruised along local streets gawking at ruined homes and at the unfortunate who have been displaced by Tuesday's earthquake.

The Red Cross reported that more than 500 people had spent Saturday night in three shelters in the Watsonville area, and Red Cross organizer Dale Gates said he estimated at least as many people are living in hastily assembled tent cities on school playing fields, public parks and empty lots throughout the city. Some local churches have also established shelters.

"We're going to be here a long, long time," Gates said Sunday afternoon. "I've heard estimates that 7-10,000 people (in the Santa Cruz County area) have had to move out as a result of this earthquake."

Traffic was at a virtual standstill along Lincoln Street Sunday as cars slowed to look at houses that had been rocked off their foundations, at chimneys that had fallen and at structures that crumbled in Tuesday's 6.9 earthquake.

Many people stretched out of cars with small cameras, taking snapshots of the devastation. People with video cameras walked

up and down the street, shooting records of the destruction and of the families huddled in tents at Callahan Park.

Many of the cars and trucks that clogged the city streets Sunday afternoon came to Watsonville bearing aid for the homeless, but there was no coordinated distribution effort setup to handle all the offerings. While mountains of donated clothing and blankets and food piled up along Airport Boulevard near the National Guard Armory, where the Red Cross is running a shelter housing about 500 people a night, much of the aid was just driven to the tent cities, where families scrambled to grab what they could while they could.

According to Gates, 12 local charity organizations met with city officials Sunday afternoon to discuss where to put the donated items that are flooding in from throughout the state.

"I had six semi-rigs show up yesterday that we had to tell to park on Beach Street," Gates said. "The city has had to open two warehouses to hold things."

While the sudden flood of aid is impressive, it's posing problems for Gates and other charity organizations. "We don't have the manpower to separate all the goodies we're getting," he said. Still, Gates didn't want to discourage the stream of supplies. "If we scream stop, in the long run the people who



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Mountains of donated food and clothes piled up in Watsonville.

are going to be out of their homes for 2-3 months are going to lose," Gates said.

Gates said that a shelter at Freedom School which had housed about 100 people Saturday night was being moved to the County Fairgrounds Sunday and that all the tent now pitched on school-grounds about the area would have to be moved so local schools could resume classes.

"I have to have everybody off the school grounds no later than tomorrow afternoon," he said. Gates said he hoped he could con-

vince many of the people who have expressed fears of going inside buildings to move to the Fairgrounds.

"We've got to find them and feed them," he said.

As Sunday night approached and a forecast of heavy rain threatened, people in tent cities at Callahan Park, Watsonville High School and E.A. Hall Middle School withdrew within their tents, many wearing layers of clothing to keep them warm in the night. And the line of slow cars passing through this ravaged town continued.