

Watsonville Ford's adopts new image

Firm updates merchandise, clothing

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WATSONVILLE — You may not recognize the soon-to-open Ford's department store downtown.

The \$9.5-million, 76,000-square-foot store will reopen Oct. 17 in the exact Main and West Beach street location the firm has occupied since 1852.

But the store that replaces the one razed after the 1989 earthquake will be very different from its predecessor — and it won't be just physical differences.

Ford's new president, Jim Vicars, said the 10-store, Central Coast chain is shedding its conservative image. It will carry much more contemporary styles of clothing and other merchandise, he said.

"Yes, we've had a rather stodgy image," Vicars said. "But people are going to find a very different look for Ford's."

Young men's, women's and children's clothing departments will be updated and expanded. The children's department will even feature a yellow brick road, ala The Wizard of Oz.

All-new merchandise will be trucked into the new store. Existing merchandise at Ford's temporary store two blocks away will be sold during ongoing sales, said

Ford's Senior Vice President Hal Hyde.

"We've been old and stodgy, but we're really updating," Hyde said. "We're changing and moving."

Hyde added that it has not been decided whether Ford's will open again in downtown Santa Cruz. "We have not made up our mind in Santa Cruz," he said. "We've been very preoccupied with this store."

The new building will feature a glass-topped atrium in the center of the store — right above Watsonville's first escalators. The atrium allows for plenty of natural sunlight, much of it shining on the escalator's red handrails.

The old store had grown from eight different buildings over the past 139 years, and had walls, stairways and elevator shafts that didn't always match. The new store has a more open, airy and modern look.

There are polished-granite exterior walls at the store's three entrances. The interior features Italian marble aisles and five colors of carpet, as well as salmon-colored pillars.

Where customers used to enter the store from a rear parking lot, going through what was the hardware and later the housewares de-



Ford's Senior Vice President Hal Hyde rides the escalator at the new Watsonville store.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

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10-3-91 — Jim Vicars, Ford's president

partment, now they'll step right into an apparel department from that entrance.

Additionally, there will still be a Main Street entrance, as well as a new entrance off Beach Street. The latter will serve the new \$3.8-million, 208-space parking lot that the

city will soon begin building at West Beach and Rodriguez streets.

The new store will also include the Plaza Diner and Bakery, operated by the owners of Bake Rite Bakery in Watsonville, as well as a beauty shop and travel agency.

Watsonville Mayor Todd McFar-

ren called Ford's reopening "a real shot in the arm."

"Not only in terms of sales-tax revenue, but Ford's is symbolic of Watsonville," he added.

Hyde noted that the Watsonville store had always been considered the chain's flagship store. The new store will be second in size only to Ford's Pacific Grove store.

A 40,000-square-foot merchandise-receiving service center and corporate-office building is being built behind the new store. That is expected to open Jan. 15.

The new store is scheduled to open at 5:10 p.m. Oct. 17, right after ecumenical ceremonies that will be held in Watsonville Town Plaza.