

Watsonville economy on the upswing

Campos 'state of the city' address points to 'positive' developments

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WATSONVILLE — In a "state of the city" speech that was part information and part pep talk, Mayor Tony Campos told downtown merchants yesterday that the city's economy is improving and is on the verge of further improvements.

"We want the community to understand the positive things we're doing," Campos said, ticking off a number of recent projects: the opening of Gottschalk's in the old Ford's building this month, the proposed North Main Street shopping center that would include Target and Wal-mart stores and the soon-to-be-completed downtown transit center.

The key to keeping the economy on an upward swing is providing new jobs, Campos said, mentioning that the city has 13 percent of the county's labor force, but unemployment that ranges from 20 to 25 percent.

Campos also presented statistics

that show the city's residents make less money and don't have as much education as the county average.

Campos said Watsonville has too much retail "leakage" — local residents going out of town to buy goods.

"If you need a camera, walk to your neighborhood store. Don't go out of town," Campos told 55 merchants, developers and city officials in a lunch meeting at the Miramar Restaurant on Main Street.

"We need all the energy the city has to promote downtown," Campos said.

He called on his audience "to stand up and support us" when the city goes to the Local Agency Formation Commission to seek expansion of city boundaries at some future date.

The city wants to expand to allow more room for industrial development, Campos said, and to create more housing that would alleviate overcrowding in the city's

See CITY, back of section

CITY

From page 1

poorer neighborhoods.

West Marine is moving its warehouse to Hollister because "we didn't have 15 acres" for the company to build a new warehouse, Campos said. The city was able to convince West Marine to keep its corporate offices here, Campos said.

Campos blamed county supervisors for policies that he said have prevented the city from expanding its boundaries and having more industry.

He said the county's "rigid regulations" have "pigeon-holed" Watsonville residents into "a group that doesn't make a lot of money."

Schools need to emphasize basics, Campos said, and provide training for the jobs that come into the city.

Asked by a member of the audience about water, Campos said, "Water-wise, we're positioned very well."

After the meeting, Campos said he was referring to the city's drinking water supply. He acknowledged there are problems with saltwater intrusion and overdraft of the groundwater supply for the agricultural areas around the city.

Campos was giving his state-of-the city for a second time. The first time was to a group of Latino merchants.

The information Campos presented is interesting, but "it's the spirit that counted," said Doug Kaplan, owner of Watsonville Square shopping center, after the speech.

"Watsonville always has had a can-do spirit," Kaplan said. "You don't find whiners and complainers in Watsonville."

REFERENCE