

# New era for Watsonville council

## Three Latinos to take seats; some activists unimpressed

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WATSONVILLE — In one fell swoop Tuesday, Latino representation on the Watsonville City Council will triple. But will it mean drastic changes for Watsonville politics?

No, according to some of Watsonville's activists, who say the new council will be even more conservative than the outgoing one. They maintain the three Latino councilmen do not represent Watsonville's "mainstream" Latinos — namely the working, blue-collar class — who need affordable housing and year-round jobs.

Others add that an election with no opposition definitely gives the impression of a good deal of indifference to politics within the Latino community.

And yet, other Watsonville activists — and the candidates themselves — are pleased at the increased representation for

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the city's 61-percent Latino majority. They say district elections are working — namely, achieving more Latino council members.

At the same time, they agree that it will take more time before more liberal Latino council hopefuls emerge.

Watsonville Mayor Todd McFarren said, "The irony, and one of the unintended consequences of district elections, is that some thought it would produce Latino (council) candidates to the left of center. But district elections didn't require that candidates be left of center or right of center, for that matter."

After Tuesday's election, Vice Mayor Oscar Rios will be joined by two fellow Latinos

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Latinos Al Alcalá and Tony Campos will join Oscar Rios on the Watsonville Council.

## Candidates hope more Latinos will get involved

WATSONVILLE — All three of the incoming Latino Watsonville City Councilmen see their race as being a benefit in representing Watsonville's 61-percent Latino majority.

The three — incumbent Oscar Rios and newcomers Tony Campos and Al Alcalá — face no opposition in Tuesday's election.

Yet, Rios — who currently is Watsonville's vice mayor — said he doesn't want to see Watsonville Latinos sit back and be satisfied with what they've got.

"It would be a mistake to say, 'OK, now we have three Latinos (on the council), do your thing,'" he said. "We have to build on this new level of leadership for the next election."

Rios agreed with other

**'We have to build on this new level of leadership for the next election.'**

— Oscar Rios

Watsonville Latino activists that it's going to take time for the Watsonville Latino community to become fully politically empowered. "It's a process of people getting involved and feeling comfortable with the local governmental process," he said.

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# Latinos to sit on council

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— Realtor Tony Campos and insurance agent Al Alcalá. Both of the newcomers are long-time businessmen, and considered conservatives. Rios, Campos, Alcalá and Betty Bobeda are running unopposed.

With Rios, Campos and Alcalá, the election will mark the first time in the history of Watsonville that more than one Latino will serve on the seven-member council at the same time. In the 104-year history of the city, only two Latinos — Rios, 1989-present; and Campos, 1987-1989 — have been on the council.

Mike Kostyal, a member of the Committee of Displaced Green Giant Workers who is active in Watsonville Latino politics, scoffed at the two new Latino councilmen.

"I don't think Tony Campos has ever represented the interest of farm workers, and it's hard for me to imagine that Al Alcalá will either," Kostyal said. "I see them taking the conventional view when the reality is convention has broken down."

Both Kostyal and Robert Chacanaca, an unsuccessful mayoral and City Council candidate in 1986 and 1989, agreed that the new council is going to be more conser-

## Candidates

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Campos said having three Latinos on the council should make Latinos more comfortable about getting involved.

"Maybe some people out there wouldn't step forward and bring up an issue before," he said. "Now, with three of us here, they might do so, thinking they have a better chance of getting something done."

Alcalá said, "I think it should be remembered that not all Latinos are poor and need affordable housing. We're here to rep-

resent the entire Watsonville community."

Campos agreed, saying, "I don't look at it as a person being conservative, liberal or whatever. We're all humans and our main goal is to do what's best for the whole community."

All three agreed that being Latino should help them relate to Watsonville's Latinos.

"Hey, I'm an expert in being Mexican," Alcalá said. "I was born one, and I'm going to die one."

*Keith Muraoka*

vative than the outgoing one.

"The council isn't going to change unless it's toward being more conservative," Chacanaca said. "There will be no advantage in the worker-progressive sense."

"Tony (Campos) isn't an advocate for affordable housing," he added. "And Al (Alcalá) is coming from the same venue."

Jim Brough, who was unsuccessful in his attempt to get appointed

to the council last April following the death of Councilman Johnny Kacsmayk, said, "As far as class background and commitment to the working people, I see no evidence that any of the new council members have any real commitment to working people and working people's issues."

Activist Frank Bardacke laughed at the mention of Tuesday's election. "What election?" he asked.

"An election with no one running against anyone isn't an election."

Yet, Brough — like others — is hopeful that "more Latino empowerment" will result from the new council.

Shirley Castillo, president of the Watsonville chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens, said, "The intent of the 1989 lawsuit (that resulted in district elections) was to get more Latinos on the City Council, and it certainly has done that. Now, it's up to the people who consider themselves liberal Latinos to get involved."

Joaquin Avila, the attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, which waged the legal battle against Watsonville's open-election policy, noted, "Sometimes it takes several elections before people start to file for office or gather enough resources to mount a campaign."

Celia Organista, a member of LULAC and a Latino community leader, agreed. "Doomsdayers will say that district elections are not working," she said. "But nothing comes overnight. I think there are positive signs, but we have to give district elections a chance. This is only our second election under districts."