

## Quake aftermath

# Watsonville: fears keep many Latinos outside

By COLLEEN BARRY  
The Associated Press

WATSONVILLE — Rosa Chavez has spent the nights since the earthquake in the back of her father's truck with her 8-month-old baby and other family members.

"It's just scary. I think another disaster is going to happen," said Chavez, 20. "The little kids are afraid of going into any building."

Four walls and a roof overhead no longer mean security in this predominantly Hispanic community, where residents are mindful of what happened in Mexico City four years ago. Thousands died in a tremendous earthquake on Sept. 19, 1985, but many others were killed by an aftershock the next day that trapped them inside their homes.

Now the only place many in Watsonville feel safe is among the forgiving canvas walls of tents, and not even the driving rains that have turned their campsites to mud have persuaded them into shelters or back to homes that the city has declared safe to enter.

"The biggest problem we find is that they are families and the children for the most part are frightened to death to go in buildings," Mark Svehnnigsen, part of a team from San Mateo County health services that is helping with relief efforts, said Saturday. "They are willing to bear up under the cold and rain and everything else to keep the children from screaming as they go into houses," he said.

Raymundo Leyva is one of those who fear another tremor could topple the weakened walls of his house, killing anyone foolish enough to be inside. The U.S. Geological Survey says there have already been more than 2,000 aftershocks, with more expected in the next few days that could cause additional

damage.

After Tuesday's quake, as soon as he could get to a working telephone line, Leyva called his grandparents in Mexico who had survived their own powerful earthquake.

"Everyone was crying. They said they were happy to hear from me because they thought Watsonville was gone," Leyva said. "They thought it was going to happen, the same thing that happened in Mexico City. I did, too."

Watsonville, located about 80 miles south of San Francisco, is not gone, but uncounted homes and businesses are destroyed. Amazingly, only one of the 30,000 residents was killed, the victim of a bakery collapse.

Volunteers estimate 500 people have been sleeping in the half-dozen tent cities that have popped up in parks and empty lots, all near areas where the damage has been especially severe.

Many others are sleeping in their yards or cars rather than enter homes whose foundations have shifted, porches have collapsed or chimneys have caved in roofs.

Three Red Cross shelters are already at capacity with 1,100 homeless who are willing to stay inside. On Sunday, the Red Cross opened a full-blown shelter of olive drab military tents in Ramsey Park, complete with medical and feeding facilities for those sleeping on cots.

"It's unusual, but this was something we felt we had to do because of peoples' concerns," said Red Cross spokeswoman Hope Tuttle.

The tent cities have become relief centers where volunteers from throughout the region serve meals and coffee from the backs of trucks. Donated clothes are piled under sheets of plastic and anchored by scrap lumber.

And the homeless, wearing garbage bags to stay dry, wait in long lines for

food, for tents and for diapers. They wait for anything but a roof over their heads. Others, apparently without even a tent, push shopping carts full of belongings through the streets.

"This place is a disaster," Pamela Cote, of the Santa Cruz County human resources agency, said as she tried to coax 50 survivors living in Calaghan Park to move to 22 Army tents erected several blocks away by the National Guard.

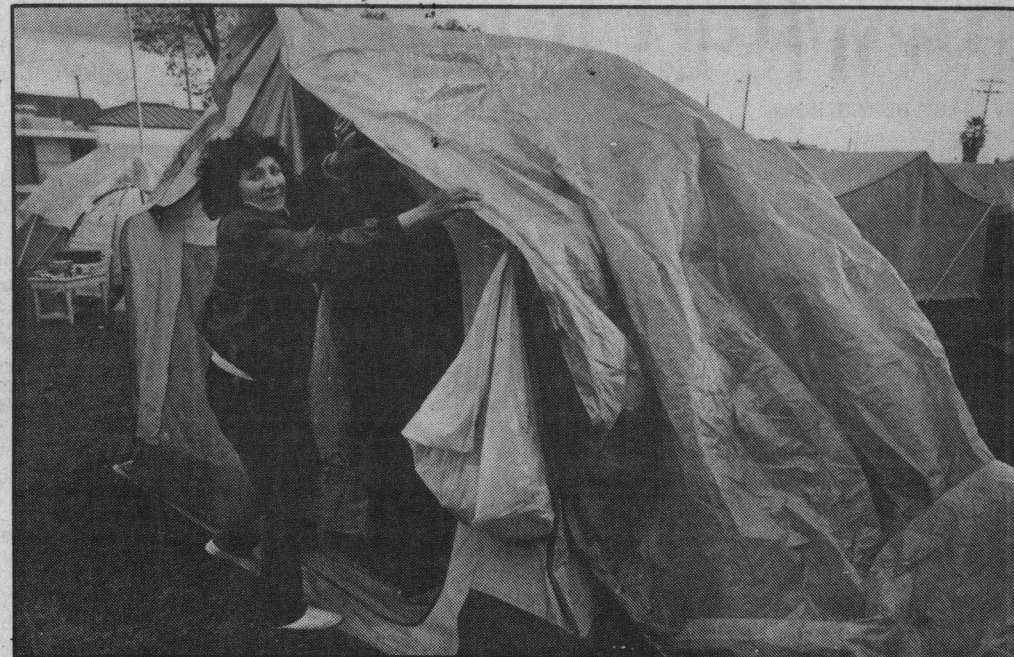
"People are everywhere on the streets in this town," Cote said. "A lot of this is cultural, they don't want to leave their houses, they are afraid people are going to go in houses and take things."

Even building inspectors' word that 363 homes have been checked and are safe to enter hasn't appeared to sway many whose confidence in even the ground beneath their feet was shaken by the 15-second jolt.

"There's this distrust of government because a lot of people are here illegally and they don't want to be turned in," Cote said. "We are giving services regardless. The INS is not going to show up."

Federal Emergency Management Agency spokesman Bill Villa in San Francisco said benefits would be provided to all victims regardless of citizenship. "There is no indication on the application whether they are a citizen or not," he said. "Disaster victims are disaster victims."

City spokeswoman Lorraine Washington said no attempt will be made to ban camping until all homes are inspected and it is determined who was left truly homeless. Workers so far have marked 330 homes unsafe to enter near the hard-hit downtown area where officials expect to raze an entire block of businesses, Washington said. That total is expected to rise dramatically as workers travel into the outskirts of town, she said.



Barbara Carmona puts rain cover over tent at Watsonville's Callaghan Park.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel



People stood in line at the National Guard Armory in Watsonville Sunday.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel