

New beginning for Watsonville landmark hotel

By JOHN BESSA
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WATSONVILLE — A new beginning was celebrated Tuesday in the 65-year history of the Resetar Hotel in downtown Watsonville.

About 150 people gathered in the lobby of the five-story hotel to mark the building's new lease on life as a home for the elderly and people with special needs.

The \$3 million project was completed after a year of repair work and renovation to fix damage wrought by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and 65 years of use.

The work was completed on time and on budget, according to Al Diludovico, executive director of Housing for Independent People, a non-profit corporation that specializes in providing low-cost housing for disabled or elderly people.

"It was a tough project. It was a gritty project. When you get into a 65-year-old building you get surprises," said Robert Corbett, the architect who designed the renovation.

The building has housed elderly residents since it closed as a hotel in 1985. HIP bought the building after the 1989 quake for about \$2 million intending to upgrade and restore the structure, according to Bruce Bratton, a local public relations consultant, who works with HIP. The structural upgrades and renovation of the building added the other \$1 million to the total cost.

The upgrades in the building include eight new rooms where a ballroom once existed, new electrical wiring, a complete fire sprinkler system, new carpet in many places, new plumbing and kitchenettes in all the rooms, according to Debra Ortiz, resident manager of the hotel.

Throughout the construction and renovation, 55 residents already living in the hotel endured noise and interruptions in utility services, Ortiz said. She praised the patience of the residents and the workers involved in the project.

"The workers were very nice in the manner that they dealt with the people," she said.

The construction didn't cause any inconveniences, said Ray Cortez, a 54-year resident of Watsonville who has lived at the Resetar for a year. Cortez said the renovation is "very nice," but that he would like new carpet in his room. Many rooms in the hotel have the original carpet, vintage 1927, according to Ortiz.

One surprise that architect Corbett found was that the roof over an old lounge adjoining the ballroom in the building had skylights which had been covered with plastic, painted black to match the old colors of the room. The skylights reappeared during the renovation, and now let the sun in on a new multi-purpose room.

The 91 rooms rent for \$325 a month, according to manager Ortiz. This includes all utilities,



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Lula Ellis, a Resetar Hotel resident for three years, sits in her recently upgraded room.

weekly maid service, cable television, complete security and free coffee in the morning, Ortiz said.

The hotel's accommodations are a departure from traditional low-income housing, according to Kristie Hatten, deputy director of HIP. She said that such housing is often considered to be "utilitarian at best," but that they are trying to create housing that can be "both affordable and have a gracious environment."

The original hotel was built by three Resetar brothers, and opened in 1927, according to Bill and A.L. Resetar, sons of the first owners.

"I don't like to think of this as an old building because it's only a year older than I am," said Bill Resetar. The family sold the hotel in 1969.



Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios addresses crowd in lobby.