



Census officials struggle to count everyone

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

About 400 people have come to the census assistance centers set up and manned by volunteers in Watsonville over the last week, and at least half of them showed up because they did not receive their questionnaires, according to the Watsonville Complete Count Committee.

Turnout at the six assistance centers was "pretty good," Raymundo Vigil, the coordinator for the committee, said. "But we didn't get to help as many people as we would have liked to. Not because they didn't come, but because they didn't have their forms."

Vigil said volunteers received another 100 phone calls from people with questions about their

census forms, and "paramount among (the questions) was 'I didn't get my form.'"

Another member of the committee said she had collected a list of more than 90 addresses of people who had not received the questionnaires. Thirty people were living at one address, and nine at another, she said.

Vigil said the problem wasn't Watsonville's alone. At a "very heated meeting" with census officials Wednesday night, a number of community people working on the census throughout the Central Coast said they were having the same trouble, he said. Vigil said part of the reason for the anger at the meeting was that local people have been telling officials all along that this was going to happen.

Several local officials had called for a door-to-door count for the areas affected by the earthquake, but the Census Bureau denied the request, insisting that the mail-out, mail-back method was very efficient.

While the request for a door-to-door count was based on fears that many people were displaced by the earthquake, Vigil said he thought there were other reasons why so many people weren't getting their forms. The problem seems to be particularly prevalent in the Latino and migrant communities, and Vigil thinks it's because many of the places people live aren't on census mailing lists and because families often double up in homes.

Other people who had received the census form and who had

questions reported having difficulty getting through on the 800 number listed on the census questionnaire, he said.

Franca Gargiulo, office manager for the district office in Salinas, which oversees Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties, said there are three reasons people aren't getting their forms.

A number of questionnaires have been returned to the Salinas office because of incorrect information in the address or because they were addressed to a specific person who no longer lives there. She said 500 have been returned to the office so far, but she's estimating 2,000 will eventually be returned. The bureau plans to hire enumerators to return to those addresses to hand-deliver the forms, she said.

There is also a 10,000-address discrepancy between the mailing list the census has and the lists from the post offices in the tri-county area, she said. There are any number of reasons an address might not be on the census list, she said. New homes and conversions are among those likely to have been missed.

There is also a group of people who "didn't get a questionnaire because we didn't know about them," for any number of reasons, she said. Some people who have called requesting forms in Spanish have said they never received them, she said, adding that she couldn't give an explanation for that.

Anyone who didn't get a questionnaire can get one sent to them by calling the Salinas office

number, 999-1990. People will have another chance to be counted during the "Were you counted?" campaign, which will begin next month. During that time, people can fill out brief questionnaires that will appear in local newspapers and will be available at post offices and other places.

Vigil said census officials have agreed to cross-check the addresses of people who said they haven't received questionnaires and will make sure they are counted. And in two weeks, an assistance center will be set up in each area, where people can trade English questionnaires for Spanish ones.

Vigil said he was encouraged

See CENSUS page 7 ►

Wilson, 7 lbs.

✓ C.F. CENSUS - 1990

► From page 1 RP 4/6/90

by what he senses is a high level of awareness about the importance of the census in the community.

"My main concern now is that people don't think the census is over," he said. The Census Bureau will take the questionnaires through May 1.

Assistance centers will continue to operate at Migrant Media, Monday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m.; Salud Para La Gente, Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and the Teamsters union hall, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Gargiulo said bilingual enumerators were still needed for the Watsonville area. People can apply for those jobs by calling 755-8200 or going to the local Employment Development Department.