

Aptos Village building collapses



A small crowd surveyed the wreckage shortly after the building fell.

Kurt Ellison

Two businesses crash to bottom of gully

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An Aptos Village building that had been red-tagged since the Oct. 17 earthquake collapsed into a gully yesterday afternoon.

"You could see all the rubble falling down the hill," said Mike Falk, who works in construction and was in an office next door to the Soquel Drive

businesses.

David Leonard, a bartender at the Aptos Club, which is along the gully perpendicular to the destroyed businesses, said the building, which housed two businesses, appeared to fall down the hillside all in one piece.

"I just happened to be looking right at it when it came down," Leonard said.

The building that fell was in the middle of the strip of Aptos Village businesses between Spreckels Drive and Trout Gulch Road. It housed the Colonial Barber Shop and the Montad furniture store, which had been red-tagged along with the Aptos Village Garage and half the Aptos Village Market to the north.

The collapse occurred about 1:45 p.m., said Barbara Woodbury, who was also in an office next door at the time.

"The only thing I thought was that it was an earthquake," she said, "but there wasn't any shaking."

Aptos-La Selva firefighters were on the scene shortly after the collapse, but left when they determined that no one was

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injured or had been in the building.

The buildings had first appeared so badly damaged by the quake and aftershocks that emergency workers had closed a portion of Soquel Drive and discussed bulldozing the buildings into the gully. The building owners were told by the county last week, however, that all the buildings along the strip were probably salvageable.

Anne Bass, who with her father, Paul Johnston, owns the buildings at the north end of the strip, including the collapsed building, said she had been discussing just yesterday morning the possibility of demolishing the building. Representatives of a local construction company had offered to demolish it for \$35,000, she said, "and then it decided to go down on its own."

Bass looked at the rubble lying partway down the gully. Furniture, a parking sign and a wooden pole partially painted in barber's stripes could be seen among the jumble of broken wood and metal siding.

"These people lost thousands of dollars down here," she said.

Howard Miller, who had run the Colonial Barber Shop since August 1983, said he had been trying to get permission from the county to retrieve a \$2,500

antique barber chair and \$6,000 worth of inventory from his shop. He's planning to reopen around the corner in Scarlett O'Haira's beauty shop, he said, but it will be difficult without his inventory.

Gus Montesclaros, who has operated the Montad home furnishings store for a little more than a year, was more distraught. He estimated he lost at least \$50,000 worth of furniture and jewelry.

Montesclaros said he was on a buying trip in Manila at the time of the quake and decided to complete it because there was nothing he could do about his Aptos store. He returned Tuesday from his trip and his store was intact.

"How can this happen like this," he said in anguish, gazing down the hillside at the remains of his store. "You know, it was here yesterday."

Leela Standal, a relative of the property owners, speculated that the vibration from passing trains and buses, as well as from aftershocks, probably contributed to the building's collapse, but a broken water main that spewed water down the slope all night after the earthquake did the most damage.

"The broken pipe is what did that," she said, looking at the wreckage. "It's like it wasn't so much the earthquake; it was erosion."

Lee Seagraves, owner of the

Aptos Village Market, said she had been waiting to see if she could salvage her inventory before filing a claim for earthquake relief. With the collapse of the building next door and fears of erosion underneath the market, Seagraves's hope has diminished and she said she now intends to file.

"Sometimes it's very hard, because of no income," she said. "You cannot pay the bills if you can't open the store."

Jim Broadwell, owner of three buildings to the south of the collapsed building, also pointed to the erosion of the slope caused by the broken water main.

"What I'm worried about now ... is erosion from the winter," he said, "and that could affect my building."

Bass said it was too soon to tell how the collapse would affect her decisions concerning her remaining buildings.

"I really don't know anything now," she said. "We'll just have to wait and see. This has been a waiting game."

Nicki Pecchenino, aide to county Supervisor Robley Levy, whose district includes Aptos, said she did not know either what effect the collapse would have. County planners are still waiting for reports from geologists and engineers hired by the building owners, which Pecchenino has said would describe in detail the damage and what must be done to repair it.