

Monterey County

The Herald

www.montereyherald.com

Thursday, January 18, 2001

Businesses try to cope with outages

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Bank doors locked, ATMs froze, prescriptions went unfilled, exhaust fans at local restaurants stalled and only women could get their hair cut downtown early Wednesday afternoon as Monterey shared in the rolling blackout blues.

Though the doors were locked, and the automated teller machines offered no quick cash, bank officers at California Bank & Trust on Alvarado Street unlocked the doors for customers they knew.

"This is one of the values of living in a town where it still feels like a small town," said Rick Johnson, executive director of the Old Monterey Business Association.

"There was a slight interruption of business," said bank manager Lynn Booth. Tellers conducted business with paper and pen instead of electrons. Customers who called with account questions were asked to call an automated system or a branch in a city that still had power.

"In today's world of computers we do have to have a backup system," said the bank's business development officer,

Lynda Avey.

Downed computers hindered business at the Ordway Pharmacy since pharmacists could not pull up customer information.

"If we would have known, we could have shut everything down. Now we run the risk of damage when the power comes back on," said Ordway owner Vince Cardinale.

At Epsilon restaurant on Tyler Street, a waitress met prospective customers at the door, telling them the regular menu wasn't available. The kitchen could whip up some Greek salads, but that was about it, she said.

No one turned away. The place was soon half full of chatty people munching cold greens, tomatoes, olives and crumbled cheese.

At Rosine's restaurant on Alvarado Street, owner Jim Culcasi said he had only lost one lasagne. Cooks cooked by candlelight and diners dined by daylight.

Manager Jim Culcasi Jr. said the restaurant had enough clean glassware and silverware to keep operating.

"In the evening, it would be a different story," he said. Powered by natural gas,

"Everything came to a grinding halt."

Chris Johnson
Copy King manager

the Rosine's kitchen functioned almost normally, lacking only a microwave and toaster. The most noticeable inconvenience was loss of the computer. All the checks had to be rung up manually.

"A Rosine's employee ran in to pick up some old fashioned Visa sales slips," said Avey at California Bank and Trust, "and we had to dig some out of archives."

At the Copy King on Calle Principal, the blackout hit harder.

"Everything came to a grinding halt," said manager Chris Johnson. With the machines jammed, workers straightened up and set up jobs. Like Cardinale, she would have liked to have known about the blackout ahead of time.

Outside Hellam's Tobacco Shop, owner Gene Palermo leaned against a lamppost sucking on the bitter end of a cigar,

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waiting for the lights to come back on.

"We're staying open," he said.

Hellam's uses battery-powered calculators instead of electric registers. Though the blackout hurt sales, Palermo said, the business has seen much much worse during the 108 years it's been open - including blackouts during World War II.

Down the street at Supercuts, men

had to wait until the power came on to get a trim. Electric clippers are the weapon of choice for men's haircuts, but a simple pair of scissors suffices for coiffing a woman's 'do.

Hairdresser Jila Shiraian said they just told male customers to wait or come back later. There was no line for women, provided they didn't want a blow-dry or curl.

Herald Staff writer Thom Akeman contributed to this report.