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PALO ALTO
MENLO PARK
EAST PALO ALTO
ATHERTON

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The first East Palo Alto City Council members, (left to right) Barbara Mouton, James Blakey Jr., Ruben Abrica and F.J. "Omwale" Satterwhite, celebrate after being sworn in Friday night.

Birth of a city celebrated — mayor elected

By Ruthann Richter
Times Tribune Weekly staff

EAST PALO ALTO — More than 200 people celebrated the birth of East Palo Alto Friday as a few dozen protesters continued to resist the emergence of San Mateo County's 20th city.

In a ceremony on the lawn at the Ravenswood Recreation Center, four of the new city's five council members were sworn into office. Councilwoman Gertrude Wilks, a vocal opponent of cityhood, did not attend the ceremony.

Wilks, however, did appear at a meeting two hours later at the Municipal Building, where the council met for the first time to pass a series of ordinances and resolutions enabling the new city to operate.

The council also elected Barbara Mouton as the city's new mayor and James Blakey Jr. as vice mayor.

Mouton momentarily bowed her head and cried when introduced as leader of the city she worked so

hard to create.

A big cheer went up in the council chambers, lined with about 200 spectators. Protesters responded with a chorus of boos. They stood up with signs saying, "Fraud Vote," "Illegal City," and "15 Votes is not a Mandate."

Earlier in the day, opponents of cityhood claimed they had evidence of voter fraud in the June 7 incorporation election. Incorporation passed by only 15 votes, with 1,782 voters favoring the move.

At a press conference Friday morning, members of the Citizens Coalition Against Incorporation Now said they had found at least nine residents who had absentee ballots cast for them in the election.

Several of the residents have signed sworn affidavits saying they did not vote in the election or that other people voted for them, the CCAIN members said. CCAIN has turned over the information to the San Mateo County district attorney's office and the United States Post Office.

Despite the continuing disunity in the city, ceremonies on the recreation lawn were festive and full of pride.

Councilman Blakey reminded the crowd of the work ahead.

"We must realize this is just a beginning," he said. "The formal act of becoming a city has great emotional and psychological complications. Now the election is over, it is time to close ranks and pull together. The healing must occur."

At least two dozen speakers talked of their warm feelings for the new city, while young residents sang and played music. Many local figures attended the event, including county judges, county supervisors, council members from neighboring cities, school district trustees and law enforcement officials.

At the end of the swearing-in ceremony, 50 yellow balloons were released into the air with the message, "A City is Born."