

Peace marchers celebrate atmosphere of optimism

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APTOS — In an atmosphere of optimism, a Veterans Peace Action Team en route to Nicaragua and about 50 peace marchers traveling from Santa Cruz to Monterey met for lunch in Aptos Friday.

Members of the third Veterans Peace Action Team to head for Nicaragua were introduced at a press conference at the luncheon, held at the Unitarian-Universalist Church on Freedom Boulevard.

Scott Rutherford, veteran of the first two teams that toured Central America, introduced four of the six veterans who will leave Sept. 29 for about three weeks in El Cedro, Nicaragua. Team member Rick Schoos, of Santa Cruz, is in Nicaragua making arrangements, while Frederick Jacob, a Vietnam-era veteran and emergency-medical technician from Minneapolis, was scheduled to arrive in Santa Cruz

Friday night.

The six veterans will continue the work of the second team, which in June reconstructed a health post in El Cedro that had been damaged by U.S.-backed contras, Rutherford said.

El Cedro is in northwest Nicaragua, about 25 miles from the Honduran border. It has suffered three contra attacks in the past four years, the veterans say.

Rutherford said the teams of U.S. veterans have been invited to Nicaragua by the 130,000-member Union of Small Farmers and Ranchers "to begin a process of reparation in the war zones."

He said the teams of veterans, along with protesters in the United States, are "trying to interdict, if you will, this war, both in Nicaragua and here in the United States."

"Today, you have to join one side or the other," team member Bill Spong, a World War II Navy veteran from Aptos, told the cluster of re-

porters.

While the veterans spoke to reporters, peace marchers rested 11 miles into their 50-mile walk for peace, the third Santa Cruz-to-Monterey march for peace in Central America.

The marchers left the downtown Santa Cruz clock tower at 8:30 a.m. Friday, and planned to spend the night in Watsonville. They planned to walk 22 miles to Marina Saturday, and to finish the march Sunday, walking the final 9 miles to a rally at Window on the Bay Park, near Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey.

"I expect we'll have 350 to 400 (marchers) by the time we get to the rally in Monterey," said Gerald Friedberg, one of the march organizers.

"The tone of the march is much more positive, much more hopeful" this year, Friedberg said.

"The signs reflect that," he said. "There are more signs supporting things instead of being against things. There are signs supporting the Arias peace plan" for Central America, proposed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias.

Max Greenberg, a marcher from Santa Cruz, agreed. "We're getting more peace symbols, more honking, we're getting more smiles," he said.

"I think in general people are much more receptive this time to the idea" of a peace march, Greenberg said.

After the meal, a few announcements were made, moleskin was distributed for "blisters or potential blisters," and the crowd regrouped in the sunshine, unfurling banners and hefting signs.

"See you down the road!" Friedberg shouted from the throng of marchers as they filed past the veterans team, turning south along Freedom Boulevard.