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Aptos foundation revs at full throttle

Efforts give schools a boost

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APTOS — If you thought the first-ever Aptos fireworks show at Seacliff State Beach last fall was big — just wait.

The Rudolph F. Monte Foundation is doing it again this year but with thousands more people, three times the food and a lot more money.

And that's a really good thing because the foundation, which was recently named Organization of the Year by the Aptos Chamber of Commerce, has opened up its fund-raising efforts not just to the six Aptos schools it originally sought to fund, but to any county school or organization that wants to participate.

"It's been wonderful, I've done all these events and it's been a blast," said Libby Wilson, a parent at Valencia Elementary and president of the home and school club.

The same company that handled fireworks at the Olympic ceremonies and the Super Bowl will launch hundreds of shells off the cement ship for the alcohol-free event. The whole of Seacliff State Beach will be reserved for ticket holders, and no one without a ticket will be allowed into the park. When the event opens at 4 p.m. Oct. 12, revelers will be greeted by more than 40 food and game booths along the sand.

Last year's fireworks netted

\$52,000 for the foundation. This year, organizers hope to raise \$75,000 to \$100,000.

"This is an easy opportunity to make money for schools or clubs," said Micki Witzig of the Cabrillo College Adaptive Physical Education program, who will work a chicken and chips booth. "Our goal is \$5,000, of which we get half."

The engine behind this giant fund-raising train is a powerhouse guy by the name of Marc Monte.

Monte began the foundation, named for his father, one year ago and in that time has raised a total of \$250,000. Monte began the foundation to help the six Aptos area schools. But in July he decided that because the whole county could benefit financially and socially from such large events, he would open it up to the whole county.

"The message of the foundation is getting the community to work together as a common unit for the good of the children," Monte said. "It rubs off on the kids when they don't see a fragmented community."

Monte's fund-raising method is pretty straightforward.

He donates a huge amount of food from the family store, Deluxe Foods of Aptos, to the schools and organizations for their booths. In return, those groups sell tickets to the events, help set up, break down and clean up. Meanwhile, Monte solicits donations from county businesses.

At the last fund-raiser, a Hawaiian luau at the Deer Park Center, Monte said one parent from Valencia Elementary donated vegetables



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

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to feed 1,300 people. Someone else donated the charcoal to fuel the huge barbecues. Monte said he routinely receives checks in the mail and offers from all sorts of businesses that just want to help out.

"This year everything is paid for by sponsorship money, and I'm not even done getting the sponsors yet," said Monte, adding that the all-profit event will be a first for

the Monte Foundation.

The tireless and highly effective donation-seeker has, among other things, raised enough money to paint Bradley Elementary, build a new library and media center for Valencia Elementary, start new programs at Aptos Junior High and provide Internet wiring for all six schools. And the foundation still has \$80,000 in the bank.

Although the fund-raising effort is now open to the whole county, the original six Aptos schools will still earn more of the large grants Monte has distributed in the past. Monte said it will remain that way until they can build the foundation's bank account. Until that time, new participants, such as Linscott School in Watsonville, will take away half of what they make on ticket sales and their booths. The foundation takes the other half.

"We don't really know what to expect," said Nancy Crawford, a Linscott parent who will work a game booth. "We're always looking for ways to make money."

And Monte really only asks for two things in return — that everyone does their part to make the event a success and that everyone buys tickets early.

"Anyone who throws a party knows it's rude not to RSVP," Monte said. "I'm asking people to buy tickets early so I know what to plan for."

So far 2,000 tickets at \$5 each have been sold, and Monte said State Parks will allow only 15,000 tickets. He anticipates a sell-out and said with the combined effort of all the county schools, the second annual Aptos fireworks show could "make history."