

Evangelist brings message of healing to Santa Cruz festival

Events (Festivals, Holidays, etc)

55mn 9:23.00

BEACH AUDIENCE TAPS POWER OF PRAYER AND SOLIDARITY

By Michelle Guido
Mercury News

Brought together by faith — whether they were searching for it or showcasing it — an estimated 20,000 people crowded the Main Beach in Santa Cruz on Saturday to hear a spiritual message from the evangelical preacher some call the “next Billy Graham.”

Luis Palau, a modern, multimedia, world-roaming evangelist, brought his message to Santa Cruz this weekend for the first time, in a festival featuring Christian music, family activities and a gospel message reflecting on the terrorist attacks of almost two weeks ago.

“America is on its knees,” Palau said, “but it’s on its knees to pray, not to surrender.”

Palau, 66, was among 30 religious leaders to visit President George W. Bush at the White House on Thursday to formulate a plan for “healing the nation and preparing for the challenges ahead,” he said. They met in the White House just hours before Bush’s address to the nation Thursday night.

“The president told us that prayer has kept him steady and sustained,” Palau said Saturday. “He asked us to pray that Americans will be steadfast and patient, and that our leaders will proceed with wisdom, faith and clear thinking.”

For many people, the Beachfest celebration, “Great Music and Good News,” was more than a religious gathering. It was a time to come together with others, to interact and pray and show solidarity. And because of the terrorist attacks Sept. 11, Palau changed the format of the festival to address the tragedy and allow festivalgoers to participate in healing.

Children were able to sign a massive kids-to-kids greeting for children throughout the country affected by the attacks.

Pat Gonzales of Salinas came to Beachfest with six family members. The clan arrived several hours early and created a makeshift camp —



LUCI S. HOUSTON — MERCURY NEWS

Keith Huffman, 11, of Santa Cruz, joins a prayer Saturday during a Christian festival. The weekend event features music, family activities and a gospel message reflecting on the terrorist attacks.

with chairs, blankets and the American flag overhead.

“As the daughter of a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps, I was raised to cherish this flag, and I do,” Gonzales said. “And I’m comforted by being around a bunch of people who still know that even though the world is in turmoil, the Lord is the one we’ve got to lean on in these scary times.”

Palau’s youth-oriented festivals have been held in a riverfront park in Portland, Ore., his hometown, and in a down-

town park in Boise, among other places. He considers stadium crusades like Billy Graham’s outdated, too cathedral-like. In Santa Cruz, he welcomed a chance to be on the beach.

“We want to be right downtown, where the people are,” he told the Mercury News last week. “We’re out in the open, and we invite everybody.”

The festival will open early today for food sales and the children’s play area, followed by professional skateboard exhibitions. The Luis Palau



Palau

BEACHFEST

with evangelist Luis Palau

Where: Main Beach, Santa Cruz

When: Today from 1:30 p.m.

Parking: Remote lots and bus shuttles at Sky Park, Scotts Valley; Harvey West Park, Santa Cruz; Cabrillo College, Aptos. Walking, bicycling urged. No street parking near the beach.

Tickets: Free. No tickets required

Praise Band kicks off the music, followed by the Christian music stars, followed by Palau, followed by more music. dc Talk and Jaci Velasquez are the closing bands.

Contact Michelle Guido at mguido@sjmercury.com or (408) 295-3984.