



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

The band Los Morros del Norte delivers a popular Mexican tune Sunday at the 16th annual Watsonville Strawberry Festival at Monterey Bay in downtown Watsonville.

Bigger and juicier

Events 2000 RP 8/310

Expanded Strawberry Festival draws thousands to Watsonville

By JON CHOWN

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

From a room on the fourth floor of the Civic Plaza building, Watsonville Police Chief Manny Solano scanned the immense crowd Sunday at the Watsonville Strawberry Festival.

Children were playing, mothers were pushing strollers, many people were eating and thousands of people were lined up for carnival rides. The scene was spread out along Main Street, with carnival rides set up down Second Street, a muscle car show along Maple Avenue, arts and crafts on Beach Street and more food on East Lake Avenue — a significantly larger

area than previous festivals held downtown.

Solano was not relying on his binoculars alone. Volunteer Bill Neighbors was operating a laptop computer that was connected to four cameras and several screens around the room. Neighbors switched from camera to camera, moving them remotely to have a look around the entire festival.

"This is really slick," Neighbors said. "If a problem is reported, we can look at the spot right away with the camera — and all of this is being recorded, too."

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A man heads home from the festival with a flat of fresh Berry Bowl strawberries.



Ami Madrigal (left) and her sister, Nevaeh, get plenty of laughs out of a ride on the Frog Hopper.

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A young girl gleefully charges into the jaws of a massive tiger jump house, one of 14 attractions provided by Classic Amusements.

FESTIVAL

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With police watching from rooftops and volunteers and police cadets patrolling alleyways and parking garages, Solano said the police had a significant presence at the festival without being intrusive.

"The expansion has really helped," Solano said. "You can really see the difference from last year. Everything was condensed before. It was hard for people to move around. This is really helpful in terms of identifying potential problems."

City promotions coordinator Doug Mattos said the festival's expansion came with more time to plan the event. Last year, he said, the city had six weeks or so to come up with a plan after the man the city hired to promote the event, Les Peterson, told the city he would be holding his own berry festival at the fairgrounds.

"It's worked out phenomenally well," Mattos said. "The vendors are happy, the downtown businesses are happy, the plaza is bustling with people, but there is room to move around, see things and enjoy."

Mattos said future expansion would extend down East Lake Avenue.

"We wanted to establish a larger footprint this year without experiencing all the growing pains of full expansion," Mattos said. "We have about 60 percent more room for crowds this year."

Theo Wierdsma was in the middle of Main Street to promote the Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show, which will take place on Labor Day, and was selling flats of strawberries for \$12.

"It's going very well," Wierdsma said. "We sold more flats yesterday than we did in two days last year."

As the president of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, Wierdsma was also helping at the PV chamber booth, which was providing information on other activities going on in the valley.

"I've talked to people from Reno, San Jose, Greenfield, San Luis Obispo," Wierdsma said. "There is even a group from Ukraine."

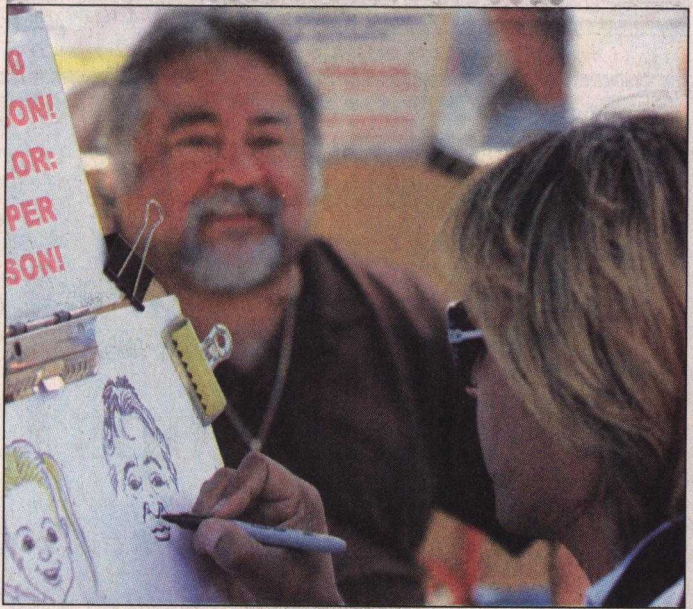
Farther up Main Street, Carlos Rico called out for folks to try some strawberry shortcake — a \$5 fundraiser for the American Red Cross.

"This is great, it really brings people together," Rico said.



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Laura Barragan (from left), Victoria Bermudez and Stacey Papion prepare to enjoy strawberry treats.



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Pete Galvan has his portrait drawn by a sketch artist.

Strawberry-themed food was everywhere. Besides the obvious treats like shortcake and chocolate-covered berries, there was strawberry kettle corn, strawberry pizza and even strawberry tamales. The other great attractions were the 14 carnival rides and games provided by Classic Amusements.

Lisa D'Olivo, who owns Classic Amusements with her husband, George D'Olivo, said the Strawberry Festival is one of two events she attends and works at.

"This is one of our favorite venues," she said. "We are just privileged to be a part of it. It is really community-based and people here are so nice."

While standing in line for the Ferris wheel with his two daughters, ages 8 and 4, Walt Barrows of Capitola said he really appreciated the family atmosphere of the event.



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Maya Chavez, 4, enjoys her butterfly face painting at the Smiley Orca face-painting booth.

"It's very clean and very kid-oriented — no smoking, no drinking — and very well-organized," Barrows said. "We will definitely come back."