

Out on the town

Annual Gay Pride Parade makes a colorful splash along Pacific Avenue



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Marchers line up behind the UCSC Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered banner during the 24th annual Gay Pride Parade in Santa Cruz. **Top:** 'Carlos the Beautiful,' a k-a Mariposa, kisses a woman from the crowd as he rides atop a parade float. **Below:** A parade participants blows a kiss.

A thousand marchers take part in 25th annual event

Gay Lesbian
By INGA MILLER
Sentinel correspondent

SANTA CRUZ — It's conceivable a Sunday morning walker might have mistaken the people gathered at Cathcart Street and Pacific Avenue to be readying for one of the city's typically tame downtown celebrations. Conceivable but unlikely.

The spirit and energy radiating from the drag queens, cheerleaders and others dressed in rainbow regalia was a good hint that this was the city's annual Gay Pride Parade.

"It's a really great community event," said Judy Hilton, who was staking out a spot in front of the Santa Cruz Roasting Company slightly before the parade's noontime start. "The enthusiasm says a lot about this place we live in."

Hilton watched the marchers parade down Pacific Avenue



paint. Steve Burke and his troop of professional cheerleaders stopped every few hundred yards to form a pyramid.

with friends who brought along their two children — ages 10 and 13. She's done it every year since moving to Santa Cruz four years ago.

"They always bring a bunch of candy to throw," Hilton said, adding that her friend's 13-year-old is at the age when many kids become uncomfortable with homosexuality, and that the parade is a good way of promoting tolerance.

The parade, now in its 24th year, is a sight to behold.

Male marchers sporting 6-inch heels, mini-skirts and waist-length wigs strutted through downtown. Less elaborate costumes consisted of little more than body

Please see PARADE — BACK PAGE

Parade

Continued from Page A1

"Santa Cruz is one of our favorite places to perform," said Burke, CHEER's head-cheerleader. The San Francisco-based group has brought its gymnasts to the Santa Cruz parade eight years running. "We perform in the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade, too, but we don't get the special attention we get here."

When the local parade started in 1975, it was one of the nation's first. The first was in New York in 1970, with San Francisco following in 1971.

"I used to do the parade on my bicycle, but I can't do that anymore, so now I do it in my wheelchair," said 74-year-old Jerry Kaufman of Santa Cruz, who has participated in the parade for 15 years in support of his gay stepson.

Kaufman said he has seen an increase in tolerance for gay people over the past two decades, and he attributed it to younger residents attracted to Santa Cruz by the university.

"My generation stinks," he said. "And if no one else from my generation is going to get out there, I will," Kaufman said.

He sported a "Promote Tolerance" pin on his cap in honor of this year's parade theme — Promote Diversity — and a cardboard sign reading "Support our Gay Children" hung around his neck.

The gay pride parades began as a way for gay people to assert their rights.

In June of 1969, police raided the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village, a popular spot with gay men. The raids were a regular occurrence, but on June 27, the day of Judy Garland's funeral, the customers decided they had had enough and fought back. They formed a human barricade, surrounding the bar for an entire weekend.

It was a landmark day in the fight for gay rights, and the New York Gay Pride Parade began the next year.

The local parade is held in conjunction with a festival at San Lorenzo Park, now in its 25th year. About 1,000 people marched in this year's parade, with about 3,000 attending the festival.

"There hasn't been one year the parade hasn't come through," said Merrie Schaller, the event's main organizer for the past 10 years.

While the county's gay community has become more visible in recent years, Schaller said tolerance for gays has not been on a continuous upward swing.

"It depends on the political drift," Schaller said. "I've had a funny feeling the past couple of years."

She said she's been hearing more stories lately of gay people being yelled at in public, which she attributes to the political climate.

"The police have been great though," she added, noting that county Sheriff Mark Tracy was among those who received an award at the festival for his service to the gay community.

Also honored were Joyce Nordquist, Ann Monsour, Jason Dimick and Raul Bunilla.

Festival-goers also were greeted with a speech by John Laird, a former Santa Cruz mayor and one of the nation's first openly gay mayors. He spoke in support of gay marriage.