

# Trouble defused, fireworks light up city's birthday

■ 'We'll do it again . . .,'  
pleased Santa Cruz official says.

BY PAUL ROGERS  
Mercury News Staff Writer

Santa Cruz's birthday fireworks show passed with flying colors, local officials said Monday, and after three hassle-free trial runs is well on its way to becoming an annual tradition.

"We'll do it again next October if we keep getting the business sponsors," said Lisa McGinnis, special events coordinator for the Santa Cruz Parks Department.

An estimated 30,000 people lined cliffs Sunday evening near the Municipal Wharf, stood on beaches and packed the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk to watch the 18-minute pyrotechnics display over

Monterey Bay to mark the city's 202nd anniversary.

Experts from Pyrospectaculars Inc., a San Bernardino company, shot about 800 softball-sized shells from mortars on Main Beach, as nearly 100 boats enjoyed front-row seats below.

Despite traffic problems near popular vantage areas, police reported no major problems. In sharp contrast to the unruly Fourth of July shows that were finally banned 20 years ago in Santa Cruz, only one person was arrested for public drunkenness near Main Beach; another was cited for possessing an open alcohol container in the same area.

Authorities credited the mostly local crowd with keeping the event under control.

"It went very well," said Deputy Police Chief Steve Belcher.

Police, park rangers and private security guards

patrolled crowds near the wharf and directed traffic afterward.

The show, which cost \$18,000, was sponsored by eight local businesses, including the Wharf Merchants Association.

Business on the wharf and beach area was brisk all day.

"I walked around out here at 7 p.m., and every business had a line in front of it," said Larry Bryson, manager of Stagnaro's Restaurant. "This is a great thing for Santa Cruz."

In a town famous for its rough-and-tumble political battles, the event has emerged as one city council issue that receives favorable reviews from all sides.

The show began in 1991 as a one-time celebration to mark Santa Cruz's bicentennial anniversary. Lo-

cal people gave it such rave reviews, flooding City Hall with congratulatory letters and calls, that the council decided to make it an annual event.

During the 1960s, Fourth of July fireworks were a holiday tradition in Santa Cruz. But tourist crowds from Southern California and San Jose grew so unmanageable that the entire area near the boardwalk became an annual mob scene with drunken fights and traffic gridlock.

The Independence Day show was banned in 1973 after a man was stabbed near Main Beach and police and ambulance crews could not make it through the crowds in time to save his life.

These days, local people prefer that the show be kept secret. The city does no advertising in San Jose or San Francisco, and deliberately holds the event on a Sunday night to keep a local flavor.