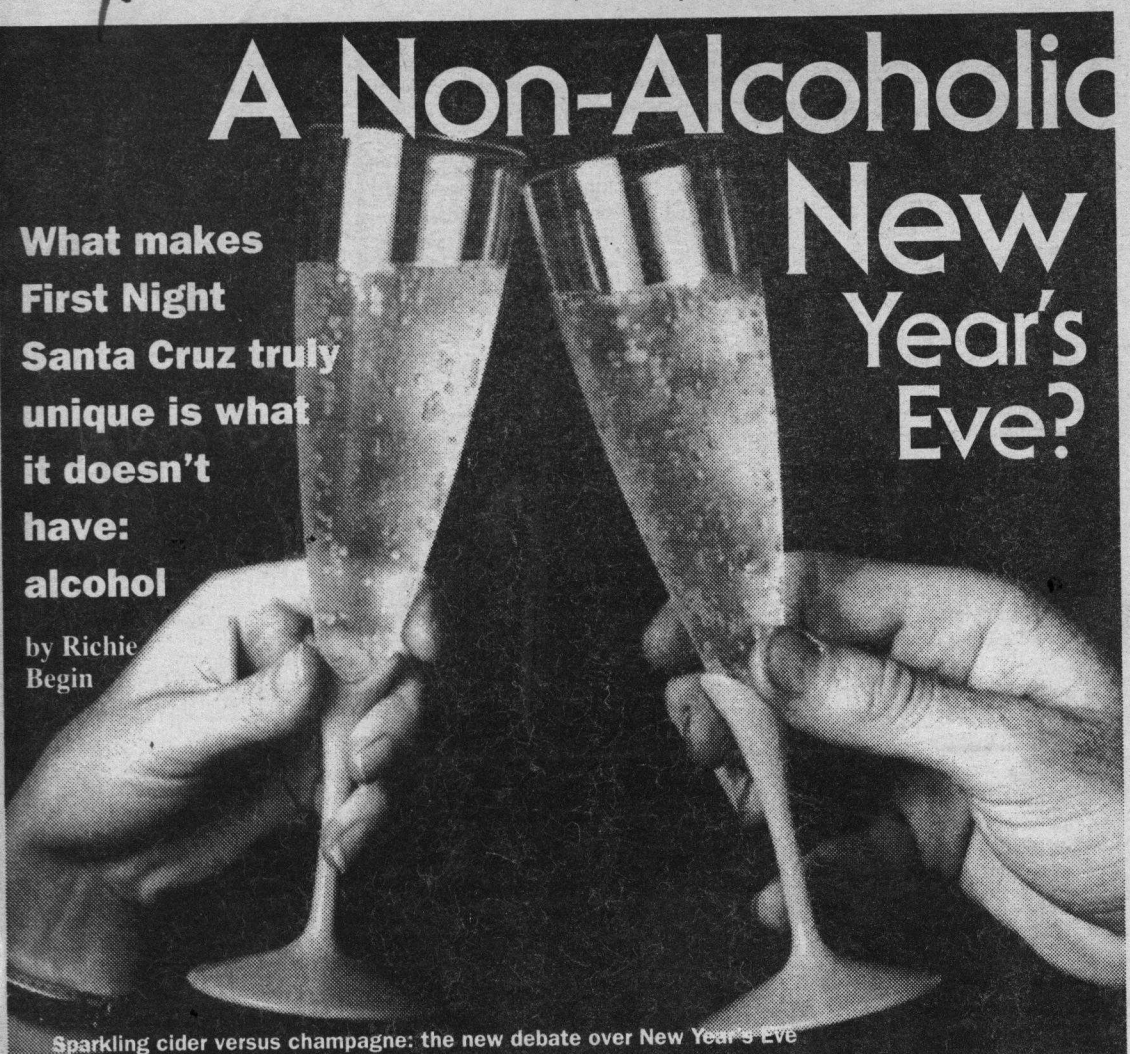


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A Non-Alcoholic New Year's Eve?

What makes First Night Santa Cruz truly unique is what it doesn't have: alcohol

by Richie Begin



Sparkling cider versus champagne: the new debate over New Year's Eve

Events

As we embark on our first First Night celebration in downtown Santa Cruz, everyone wonders how it's going to be. (Everyone hopes that it won't be like last year.) Non-alcoholic, yes. . . Suitable for the whole family, yes. . . Fun, most likely. There's never been a downtown Santa Cruz street party yet that wasn't absolutely electric with contagious anticipation. After all, that's what really makes New Year's Eve fun — the countdown to that inevitable moment when we are suddenly trans-

and will help you scout your evening's course.

All day and into the night

Starting with a 2 p.m. procession (which is great for families with small children), First Night will have performances throughout the evening and will culminate with a parade down the Pacific Garden Mall, arriving at the Town Clock in plenty of time to participate in a planned celebration to ring in the new year.

An inexpensive "all event" button can be purchased in advance for \$5 from many merchants, including all Safeway Stores, The Civic Auditorium, Cymbaline Records and Palace Arts, among others. On Saturday, First Night booths will be set up on Pacific Avenue with event buttons available for \$8.

Most importantly, however, all of the First Night-related events will be non-alcoholic.

A New Year's revolution

New Year's Eve is changing all over America, and part of that change has come in the way people choose to celebrate. It's not that the traditional champagne toasts are out of vogue or even that drinking itself has fallen out of favor on this night of nights, it's just that nowadays there are more and more alternatives to choose from in the way people celebrate and the way they view the night itself.

People have been working towards this change for years. Since 1989, the Responsible Hospitality Council has worked closely with area restaurants and bars to increase and maintain sales while informing the public about responsible alternatives to alcohol.

Director Jim Peters recently met with several area restaurant and bar owners along with new Santa Cruz Chief of Police Steve Belcher to discuss First Night '95 and ways in

which local restaurants and bars could maximize profits as well as appeal to all their customers, the ones that drink and the ones that don't.

According to Peters, "What we're doing is speaking to owners and finding ways to maximize profits while changing the image of what people think of when they think of a traditional tavern and the function it fulfills — especially on New Year's Eve. That fact is that as tastes and attitudes are changing tavern and restaurant owners are changing with them. We found that as restaurants increase their alternative drink options, they increase sales of alcohol drinks as well. Some folks in the party drink and some don't. If you can appeal to them all, you'll have all their business. It just makes sense."

Although First Night is designated as an alcohol-free community-wide event, bars and restaurants will conduct business as usual and serve their patrons anything their hearts desire. What appeals to patrons and bar owners alike is the idea of offering non-alcoholic drink specials and increasing those items on the menu all year long.

Drink recipes

To emphasize this, First Night has concocted a drink recipe contest for local bartenders. Peachwoods, for example, has submitted a recipe for "Inn Cider," while El Palomar presents "Cider Passion" and "the Pink Thing." The Dream Inn calls its entry "Marti's Clear Morning." First Night participants are encouraged to stop by the Martinelli's booth at Soquel and Pacific for a free hot apple cider and submit their vote for their favorite bartender and best drink.

For many, First Night will be the first time they've had this much fun on New Year's and not regretted it the next morning. Now there's a tradition that's changing.

NEW YEAR'S EVE IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

formed through that portal of time from one moment to the next, one year to the next, one decade, one century, one millenium to the next. . . (But we're getting ahead of things here. Read Craddock's article on page 10 for more on that one.)

First step

What makes this year's New Year's Eve so important is that it marks an historic first step towards a new way of celebrating. First Night Santa Cruz could change the way people think of New Year's Eve in the county.

Featuring a myriad of performance acts, spread out across venues throughout the downtown area, First Night will present live theater, magic acts and musical ensembles, among other things, allowing citizens to wander from event to event, sampling a potpourri of this area's finest performers. Handy schedules and an official program are available everywhere