

**'When people come to vacation on the SLOWCOAST, part of what they're looking for is the slowness, the lack of stimulation. That's the value of this region: You can find a trail to walk on and pull yourself together.'**

WALLACE 'J.' NICHOLS, SLOWCOAST owner



JAMES CLARK/SENTINEL

Wallace 'J.' Nichols, his wife Dana Nichols and their daughter Julia lounge outside the family business, SLOWCOAST, on Friday.

# Traveling the SLOWCOAST

DAVENPORT: Family unites community through a business in an Airstream trailer

Bus-5

By BONNIE HORGOS

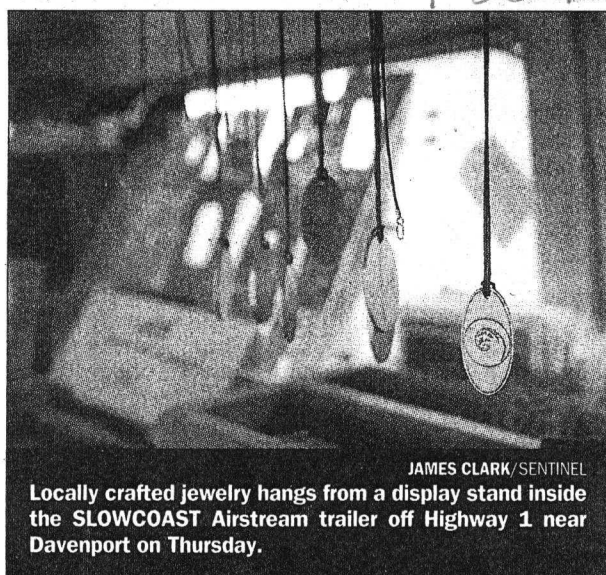
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DAVENPORT

**D**ana Nichols and Wallace "J." Nichols bought a 1954 Safari Airstream trailer 14 years ago off eBay. A "retired guy who loves to travel" drove it from North Carolina to the West Coast, where the couple used it as a guest home for a few years.

In 2011, the trailer took on a new incarnation: a shop offering organic food and local goods on Swanton Berry Farm, with a percentage of proceeds going to local organizations. They named the operation SLOWCOAST.

The story delves deeper than a 60-year-old trailer parked on an organic berry farm, though.



JAMES CLARK/SENTINEL

Locally crafted jewelry hangs from a display stand inside the SLOWCOAST Airstream trailer off Highway 1 near Davenport on Thursday.

SEE NICHOLS ON A2

# NICHOLS

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The Davenport residents use the term “SLOWCOAST” to describe the land stretching from Bonny Doon to Tunitas Creek — the winding roads down Highway 1, just after Santa Cruz, just before Half Moon Bay.

“This coast is over the hill from Silicon Valley, the fast valley, and San Francisco is the fast city,” J. Nichols said. “We’re not inventing the concept, we’re just calling it what it is. This has just been a beautiful place to work and live for a very long time. People just love the slow qualities.”

## GIVING BACK

They came up with the term “SLOWCOAST” in 2002 while hiking along the California Coastal Trail from the Oregon border to the Tijuana border with their daughter Grayce, who was 1 at the time. While they found each area uniquely beautiful, they realized they were in the exact place they wanted to live. J. Nichols, a marine biologist, grew up in Manhattan and Dana Nichols, who worked for an organic juice company, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“We saw every foot of the entire coast,” J. Nichols said. “Rather than finishing that and feeling like we wanted to move to one of the beautiful places, we realized our home was literally where we wanted to be.”

After conceiving of the “SLOWCOAST” term, the Nichols decided they wanted to do more than celebrate it — they wanted to give back. After Davenport’s Cemex plant closed in 2010 and about 100 people lost their jobs, the Nichols wanted to help give the coastal town a bit of an economic boost.

They looked to the area’s food producers and artisans — painters, sculptors, jewelry makers — and came up with a way to sell the products while creating 10 percent in business for the artists. They now sell everything from bath salts to necklaces with sporks.



Wallace ‘J.’ Nichols, his wife Dana Nichols and their daughter Julia, 8, sit inside their SLOWCOAST Airstream trailer Friday surrounded by merchandise and wares.

JAMES CLARK/  
SENTINEL

“We really thought that having a regional identity could help create healthy tourism and recovery,” Dana Nichols said.

## THE BEGINNING

The Nichols live on Swanton Road with their daughters Grayce, 11, and Julia, 8. The Nichols met at a Las Vegas conference for adopted children. J. Nichols was speaking about finding his biological parents, and Dana Nichols was about to start looking for her own.

“That’s a whole different article,” J. Nichols said with a laugh.

Amid the Vegas glitz, they discovered their common interests: organic food, sustainability and nature. They lived for a while in San Francisco, then settled in Brookdale, where they fell in love with the river and redwoods of the San Lorenzo Valley.

Still, whenever they drove past Swanton Road in Davenport, they couldn’t help but feel drawn to the acres of land dotted with redwoods and farm homes.

They were in the process of buying a house in Boulder Creek, but obstacles kept arising. When their contractor knew a family that was selling a home on Swanton Road, the Nichols took it as a sign.

“We were kind of cynical, coming from San Francisco,” Dana Nichols said. “We didn’t know if those kinds of deals ever do happen anymore.”

## AT A GLANCE

### SLOWCOAST

**WHAT:** A business that sells locally made jewelry, food and art out of an Airstream trailer.

**WHEN:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily

**WHERE:** Swanton Berry Farm, 25 Swanton Road, Davenport

**DETAILS:** [slowcoast.org](http://slowcoast.org)

## THE OCEAN

The Nichols found Davenport the ideal living area for one large, blue reason: the Pacific Ocean. J. Nichols is a world-renowned marine biologist. He was the first person to track a loggerhead turtle swimming from Baja to Mexico, then Japan. He combined his love of the ocean even more when he studied neuroscience and the ocean — essentially, why we feel so content while staring at water.

His research landed him a 2011 cover of *Outside Magazine*, as well as plenty of accolades from fellow colleagues. The research, though, touched on something even deeper for him: humans need the ocean. By studying the impact of the ocean on human psychology, he said, we can realize how much we need the sea, in turn, protecting it and stopping pollution.

J. Nichols works with Save Our Shores and regularly helps clean up the beach. He’s also in the process of editing a study on pollution. These scientific endeavors all tie into SLOWCOAST,

he said — it’s a celebration of the ocean, the coast, and the community that lives beside it.

“When people come to vacation on the SLOWCOAST, part of what they’re looking for is the slowness, the lack of stimulation,” J. Nichols said. “That’s the value of this region: You can find a trail to walk on and pull yourself together.”

The Nichols also sell SLOWCOAST items at local businesses including the Davenport Roadhouse, the main eating and performance venue in town. Erik Soderholm, the head chef there, said he first heard of J. Nichols and his work in *Outside Magazine*. Since then, they’ve become close friends.

“As far as the SLOWCOAST idea, we’re just trying to draw people in with a warm atmosphere,” Soderholm said. “SLOWCOAST draws attention to a particular area. If we go to the SLOWCOAST, we know specifically where we’re going.”

Follow Sentinel reporter Bonnie Horgos at [Twitter.com/bhorgos](https://twitter.com/bhorgos)