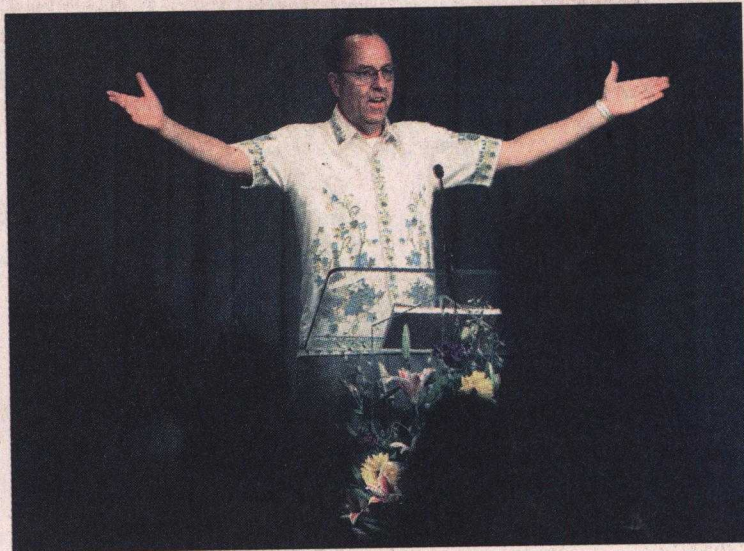
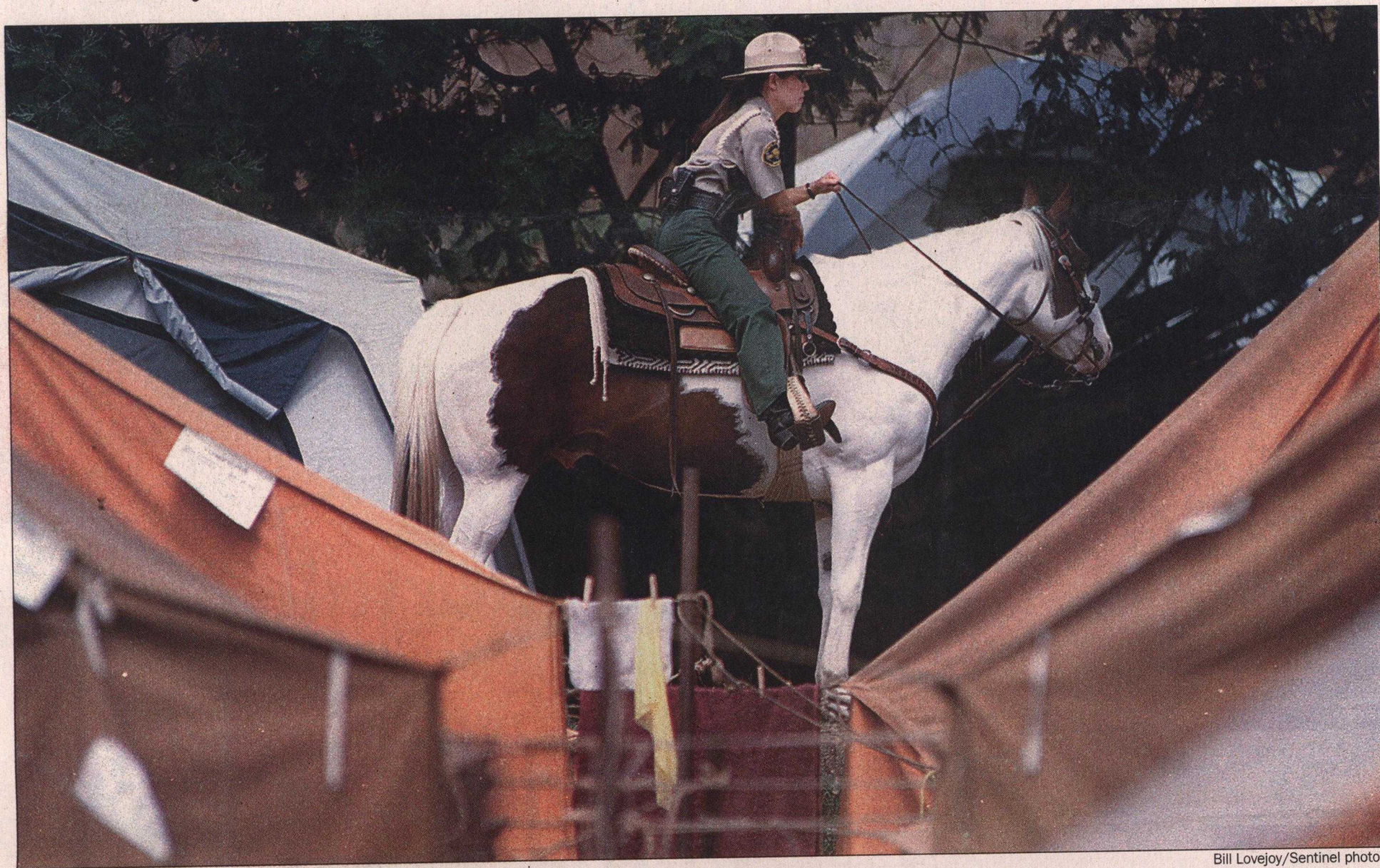


Community Training



Seventh-day Adventists hold annual Central California conference at Soquel camp



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

TOP: Dewayne Toppenberg of Watsonville leads an assembly in song at the Seventh-day Adventist encampment in Soquel.
ABOVE: Security guard Linda Atkins patrols the tent city at the Seventh-day Adventist encampment on horseback Friday morning.

By ANNE BECKER

SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

When Rochelle Stanton celebrates her 32nd birthday next month, it will be in familiar fashion at the Soquel camp meeting of the Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Stanton has marked her birthday at the campgrounds almost every year since she was born during the retreat in 1970.

SOQUEL "Way back in 1970, my parents were having a picnic lunch right here on these campgrounds and my mom went into labor," Stanton said. "I was born seven minutes after they rushed to the hospital, and I've been coming every year they've held the event ever since."

Anywhere from 4,000 to 8,000 Adventists have gathered in tents and RVs annually at the campgrounds since 1954 for 10 days filled with prayer, spiritual teaching and family recreation. This year's retreat kicked off Thursday and will run through Saturday.

Jerry Page, president of the Central California Conference, said after a year of planning, he was looking forward to a relaxing 10 days.

"It's a special time for the church people and our neighbors where we see that God really does touch our lives here and makes us better family and community members," Page said.

In addition to the rows of tents and RVs, the campgrounds feature a Christian bookshop, a cafeteria and a food store where Adventists, who are required to be vegetarians, can buy

food without having to go into town.

"It's basically like running a city," said Karen Oswald, vice president of communications for the conference. "Once you park your car, this is your vacation spot, and you really need to stay."

Stanton, whose parents still live in the area, said even though she lives in Fairfield, she wouldn't think of missing the retreat. In addition to her parents, she brings her husband, John, who takes his vacation from work as an insurance salesman every year to attend.

"People come from all over the whole state because it's so much fun," she said. "The neat thing when you come year after year is the real camaraderie that develops. I look forward to coming so much, I really enjoy catching up with people."

The Central California Conference's official territory is from Bakersfield to San Francisco, but Adventists from as far as Nevada and Arizona have attended. Oswald said the spiritual gathering offers attendees a break from everyday life.

"Life is really busy and to be able to just come away without having to go to work, without TV... It just gives us all time to really rest and regroup spiritually, physically and mentally," she said.

Throughout the 10 days, attendees can hear religious guest speakers from across North America. Children are broken into four age groups and attend their own activities and seminars with themes such as "Walking the Walk with Christ" and "God's Guidelines Guarantee Success."



Sheila and Luke Nelson of Visalia take in a morning presentation at the Seventh-day Adventist encampment Friday.

Seventh-day Adventists have been an official religious denomination in America since 1863. Chief among their beliefs is that observance of the seventh day (Saturday), rather than Sunday, will help to bring about the second coming of Christ.

In addition to Adventists, community members are invited to attend as many seminars as they like at this year's Central California Conference retreat, but Oswald said she had waiting lists for sleeping spots long before the

retreat began.

Rochelle Stanton plans to keep one of those spots and mark her birthday at the gathering for years to come.

"Coming to the camp year after year is like déjà vu," she said. "It stays the same every year. Even the smells are the same. I really just have a lot of good memories here."

Contact Anne Becker at abecker@santa-cruz.com.

7.28.02