

✓ Yeah, this is  
a great place  
to live, and  
now everyone  
knows it

History  
By **NANCY PASTERNAK**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

**SANTA CRUZ** — The cost of living here may be steep but a town that campaigns to keep itself weird is worth "the price of paradise," according to editors at Men's Journal.

The magazine's April 2005 issue ranks Santa Cruz ninth

on its "50 Best Places to Live" in America list.

A brief explanation cites Steamer Lane, hippies, a temperate climate — and UC Santa Cruz's banana slug mascot — as primary reasons for the area's assigned rank.

Mayor Mike Rotkin offers an interpretation for the slug thing.

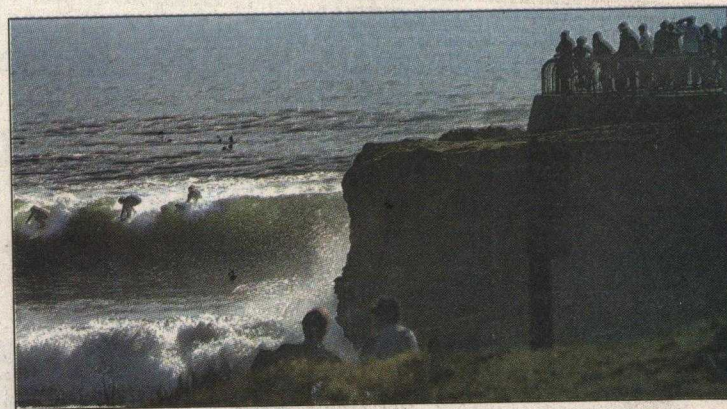
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"It's just that we're laid back here, and iconoclastic and different," he said. "We don't meet others' expectations for competitive success in life."

As was the case the previous two years, Boulder, Colo., earned the No. 1 ranking, though this year's ranking for-

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Big-wave spectators check out the surfing action at Santa Cruz's fabled Steamer Lane.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel file



## Santa Cruz

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mula differed.

Last year saw separate rankings for big and small cities, with Santa Cruz selected as fifth-best small city.

"We add variables and tweak the way you weigh things," said Tom Foster, deputy editor of Men's Journal. "We break things up differently each year so people can use the list differently."

Santa Cruzans parsed and commented on the magazine's cryptic compliments.

Longtime county resident Diane Sunseri said she can relate to liking the "climate and hippies."

"I like mild temperatures," she said, taking a coffee break at Peet's Coffee & Tea downtown.

Though she furrowed her brow at the banana slug's significance to Men's Journal, she said UC Santa Cruz contributes favorably to the town. She likes "the whole green-political-radical-left philosophy."

She much prefers Santa Cruz to other places she's lived, including San Francisco — No. 40 on the list, and Santa Barbara, No. 29.

Santa Barbara received special attention this year for having what the magazine considers the "Best Women."

Sunseri laughed.

"We don't have the same plastic

glitz as Santa Barbara does. They have 19-year-olds getting boob jobs down there," she said. In Santa Cruz, "women are real people. They're straightforward."

Among variables emphasized in the magazine's 2005 list: education level, access to wilderness areas, stress levels (a composite of health statistics, crime, commute time, resident comments, and other factors), and the number of drinking establishments, per capita.

Bloomington, Ind., ranked eighth according to this formula — a ranking Rotkin said he couldn't help but take exception to.

"I don't want to put down the other towns, but Bloomington?" Rotkin said. "Talk about visually uninteresting."

Greg Carter, director of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, said the ninth-place ranking is just right for Santa Cruz.

"The beauty of it is you can be flattered that you're one of the top 10 in the nation, but we're not going to get droves of people moving here next week."

And that place on the list might attract desirable off-season tourist traffic.

"Any recognition that puts us in a positive light helps business," Carter said.

Kevin Butler of Santa Cruz Surf Shop agreed.

"I'd have to be an idiot to say this is a bad thing," Butler said.

He knows plenty of longtime

Santa Cruzans, though, who feel differently. He's heard complaints all his life about increased surfer traffic.

"They thought the whole 'Gidget' Hollywood thing would ruin everything," he said, mocking a previous generation.

"I don't remember a time when you didn't have to hustle for waves," he said, and a few more beginners out in the water are not going to make a difference. "The guys who know how to catch waves are still going to catch waves."

Capitola resident Marc Owerfeldt said he loves "the surfing spirit" here, which he found lacking when he lived near his job in Silicon Valley.

He knows his neighbors and can walk to restaurants, bars and "one-of-a-kind shops," something he couldn't do when he lived "over the hill."

Owerfeldt's complaint about the Men's Journal list is that it does not place Santa Cruz high enough.

"I've seen a lot of the world," said the Stuttgart, Germany, native. "And this place ranks at the top, worldwide for me."

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