

# In the beginning ...

It's been 45 years since UCSC was founded  
— and Santa Cruz was irrecoverably changed



Covello & Covello

UC Santa Cruz student protest during an October 1968 visit to the campus by Gov. Ronald Reagan.

## Pre-university, Santa Cruz was 'cultural desert'

It's hard to imagine "Surf City" without a University of California campus. The local state-run school employs more than 6,000 people and is home to a world-renowned Shakespeare festival, among numerous other economic and cultural perks.

TONY  
BURCHINS  
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### Note to readers

This article is the first of four on the history of UC Santa Cruz. It's adapted from research done by the writer for his master's degree at San Jose State. The articles take in the 45-year history of the campus, from its beginnings in the 1960s up to controversies over growth in 2006. Information

be forever changed. Something weird and wonderful was happening. Santa Cruz was gentrifying.

"This was a cultural desert," explains Robert Swenson, the retired founding president of Cabrillo College, the junior college that opened in 1959 as the county's first outpost of higher education. "In those

as 1957, a steering committee chaired by Gordon Sinclair, managing editor of the Santa Cruz Sentinel, was in place under the supervision of the Greater Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

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## TONY BURCHYNS

The campus claims to have generated \$1.8 billion worth of financial activity for the county in 2003, and this year its celebrity speakers included former U.S. ambassador-turned-prominent White House critic Joseph Wilson and environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. It all adds up to a whopping gorilla in the hills above town, coaxing our attention and churning out graduates to power tomorrow's economy.

Few people dispute UCSC's basic benefits. In its 40-year history, the once-experimental campus has dramatically raised the cultural and educational profile of a formerly poor, blue-collar community. But despite its revitalizing effect on the region, a number of local residents today feel brainy-beautiful UCSC could become a drain on local government, and a nuisance to neighbors, if student enrollment climbs much higher. Town-gown relations have heated up over UCSC's new growth plan, and a local citizens group has threatened a lawsuit over construction projects, further evidence that the woodsy university campus is also hotbed of controversy in growth-conscious Santa Cruz. It's an evolving chapter in the quaint story of UCSC, which opened in 1965 as an Oxford-styled liberal arts school with 637 students, in a relatively small Santa Cruz of about 25,000 residents.

For years, the campus has gained speed, sparking a 29 percent surge in the city's population in the 1970s, reaching 10,000 students per year by the mid-1990s and sprinting to the 15,000-student mark in recent years. Now the campus may add up to another 6,000 students over the next 15 years. In step with UC policy, campus officials and their consultants are polishing a new Long Range Development Plan, while a number of Santa Cruz residents and elected officials point to traffic, water-supply and housing problems as potential pitfalls to the school's growth scheme.

The writer for his master's degree at San Jose State. The articles take in the 45-year history of the campus, from its beginnings in the 1960s up to controversies over growth in 2006. Information for this series comes from more than 40 years of newspaper clippings and interviews with more than two-dozen members of the Santa Cruz community.

It's an ironic showdown. As the story goes, the drive to bring a major university to Santa Cruz was a tremendous local undertaking. And several vocal campus-growth opponents, including county Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt and City Councilwoman Emily Reilly, both former Santa Cruz mayors, stipulate that the university brought them to town in the first place. Wormhoudt came in 1977 with her family after living two years in rustic Brookdale. Reilly arrived in 1979, gunning for a bachelor's degree at UCSC. They both discovered a lively college atmosphere, clean air and lovely beaches, all in league with affordable digs and driveable streets. Now they hope to alleviate soaring rents and snarled traffic by flagging UCSC's growth train before it leaves the station again.

"At what point is it too dense to grow bigger?" Reilly asks of her college town, now home to roughly 56,000 people, and pinioned by coveted greenbelt lands. "When do you lose the mission of educating people in this environment?"

It's a poignant question, in some ways, if only for its lack of a solid answer. And for town-gown eggheads, the query may evoke a prophetic moment in 1962, when Dean McHenry, the school's affable founding chancellor, reportedly warned the Chamber of Commerce, with a twinkle in his eye, "Sometimes you may rue the day you invited us in. But the bear's head is in the tent." At the time, a quick-witted McHenry was relishing boisterous support for a brand new UC campus to be located in the grassy hills and redwoods overlooking Monterey Bay. The city and county were about to

explains Robert Swenson, the retired founding president of Cabrillo College, the junior college that opened in 1959 as the county's first outpost of higher education. "In those days, you could retire on Social Security, buy three acres and raise chickens."

Similarly, Norm Lezin, the retired Salz Tannery chief, Santa Cruz mayor in the 1960s and longtime resident, was one of many early supporters of the UC campus. Like several others, he saw it as a boon for growth. "There was little vitality" before the campus came along, he says. Lezin moved to Santa Cruz in 1948 when it was still known as a quiet place to retire. Right off the bat, he and his wife, Margaret, realized they were the only young people in their neighborhood, by the beach on 13th Avenue. Other than the famous Giant Dipper rollercoaster at the Beach Boardwalk, there was little excitement in the sluggish town of roughly 21,000 people. It was an atmosphere where people were "less optimistic about the future," Lezin recalls.

By the time Lezin was elected to the council in 1962, though, the city was celebrating the prospect of a UC campus. Enthusiasm ran sky high for building projects that would pump cash into local businesses. There was also the prestige of becoming a "university town." Jobs and industry, youth and intelligentsia — the future was bright for what the Los Angeles Times famously referred to as a "seedy little resort town." It didn't matter that UCSC's Master Plan heralded a campus of 27,500 students, Lezin says, because that was seen as an arbitrary number. No one initially thought the campus would grow as big as that — so why worry?

Still, that Santa Cruz might be too cozy for a major UC campus was a perception the community had to fight hard to overcome. The University of California, with its plans to expand statewide enrollment in the 1950s, initially felt Almaden Valley near San Jose would make a better home for a new campus until Santa Cruz officials mustered a public relations campaign to convince the regents otherwise. As early

Greater Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

Sinclair was a vocal proponent in the quest for a UC campus. "We think we have a really good site and a good community. There are no detrimental factors, not competition for housing; it is easy to get to and it has beauty and esthetic value," he told the San Francisco Examiner in 1958.

But his group of business, industry and civic leaders would face a tough struggle in reaching their goal. While there had been some whispers in the press that the UC regents would likely locate their new campus in the Santa Cruz-Monterey area, San Jose and Santa Clara County leaders, with more representatives in Sacramento and deeper political coffers at home, were busy mounting their own lofty campaign to persuade the regents to break ground in the South Bay. Eventually, in 1961, they offered the regents \$4 million to develop one of three Santa Clara sites.

Despite the offer, the cost of the land was still too great over the hill, and several other headaches ruined the deal, including the prospect of having to bargain with multiple property owners and deal with the difficulty of controlling the land around the proposed South Bay sites. Though San Jose suburbs could more easily ramp up utilities to accommodate a large campus, Santa Cruz proponents had shown their ability to draw up compelling land-use plans and also drum up resounding community support. Furthermore, with the Santa Cruz site, the regents would only have to negotiate with one property owner, the Cowell Foundation, in acquiring the land. In the end, the regents paid about \$2 million for roughly 2,000 acres with plenty of breathing room around the edges of the property for a new university community to grow. The largest of the three Santa Clara sites had only 1,000 acres, for about the same amount of money.

Still, without a strong community effort, the new northern California campus may have landed in the South

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*'This was a cultural desert. In those days, you could retire on Social Security, buy three acres and raise chickens.'*

ROBERT SWENSON, RETIRED FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF CABRILLO COLLEGE

# UCSC

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Bay. Proponents of a Santa Clara site argued it could serve more students, and for a while it appeared that the regents felt a campus should be built close to a large center of population, i.e. San Jose. But UC officials never turned a blind eye on Santa Cruz, even while openly acknowledging a preference for San Jose. Indeed, University of California Vice President Stanley McCaffrey, speaking at the annual banquet of the Santa Cruz chamber of commerce in 1959, reportedly said the chamber's presentation of facts and materials to university officials was the "finest we had seen."

On a larger political front, then state Sen. Donald Grunsky, R-

Watsonville, and then Assemblyman Glenn Coolidge, R-Felton, urged the regents to acquire Cowell Ranch because it could be obtained at a much cheaper price, and would be the most beautiful campus in California — an oft-repeated mantra.

Sinclair, using his media savvy, reportedly sent letters to some 15 nationwide magazines asking for feature coverage of the Santa Cruz area. Meanwhile, intense development in Santa Clara County sent South Bay land prices soaring, as indicated in the press by the sale of one 90-acre site in San Jose, in 1959, for more than \$2 million.

In the summer of 1960, the regents formally approved sites in southern California that would become UC San Diego and UC Riverside. After touring the San Jose and Santa Cruz sites again, the board decided to postpone any final decision until the fall. No

decision would be made until the following year. For Santa Cruz, the final drive to ensure a Cowell Ranch campus included spending about \$20,000 (covered by the city and the County of Santa Cruz) on a detailed land-use plan to present to the regents; raising funds for scholarships as a gesture of community support; and organizing a team of delegates to eloquently pitch the project to the regents.

Advocates for the Almaden site were doing the same, having already hired consulting architects who had been working close to the regents' selection committee since its inception, and doing so with a much larger budget thanks to the City of San Jose.

In late 1960, though, the regents turned away from the Almaden Valley site and declared their preference for Cowell Ranch. A final decision on the

acquisition of the rustic ranch came in March of 1961, when representatives of the Cowell Foundation presented favorable terms of purchase to the regents. The final vote was 16-2 in favor of buying the Santa Cruz site, and the 1,994-acre purchase was finally transacted that year in November.

On March 19, 1961, the Sentinel printed several statements by "prominent" residents who agreed that a university coming to town was an extremely auspicious development. Those quoted included the city manager, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, the city's general manager, the mayor, members of the county's UC advisory committee, members of the chamber of commerce, a director for a local electronics plant and a county administrator. Said former Santa Cruz Mayor Harold Carriger: "We'll

be able to retain our natural beauty and historical traditions and yet maintain a steady rate of progress."

So began UCSC. And a new Santa Cruz sprang to life: new city libraries, new water treatment facilities and new city government buildings. Leisure lovers welcomed a golf course and a harbor. Conference backers cheered new improvements.

As today's politicians grumble over UCSC's future size, though, McHenry's tongue-in-cheek remark resonates, even if the "bear in the tent" just wants to be friends.

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Tony Burchyns is a freelance writer living in Santa Cruz. He has interned at three Bay Area newspapers, and won an Associated Press Managing Editors scholarship in 2005. He also holds a bachelor's degree in American literature from UC Santa Cruz.