



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Ray Dotson talks about Sept. 11 at the first day of the Santa Cruz County Fair Tuesday.

County Fair opens with patriotic spirit

Opening day upbeat on
eve of somber anniversary

By DAVE BROOKS

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds were abuzz with excitement Tuesday as the first day of the much-anticipated Star-Spangled Fair kicked off without a hitch.

"Being at this fair today makes me grateful for all the freedoms I have," said Irene Alejo. "It reminds me of what a great nation we live in. One where we can go anywhere we please and believe in anything we want."

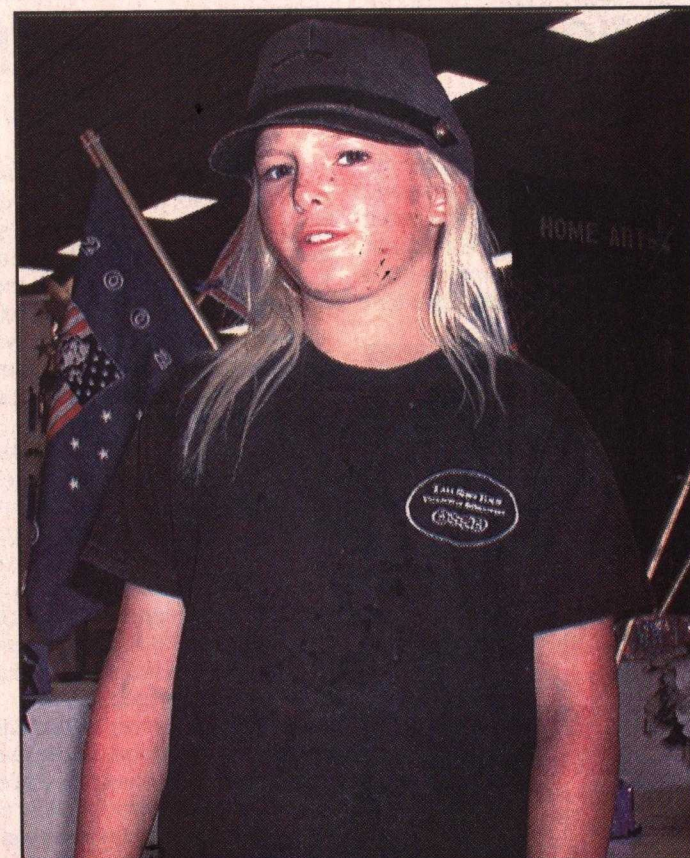
As the smells and sounds of the festival wafted through fairgoers' senses, the only thing that appeared to slow down the event's excitement was the blazing sun overhead.

The fair's bright beginning is a relief from last year's dark day, when the opening coincided with an

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ABOVE: Chris Wilson leans in for a close inspection of a display of locally grown apples Monday inside the Harvest Barn on opening day of the Santa Cruz County Fair. AT RIGHT: Nancy Kobert with her bird Kenya were at the fair Tuesday.



Rafferty Lincon enjoys the fair.



Brenda Cawaling helps fairgoers get started with their tri-tip barbecue lunch put on by the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau and the Watsonville Fire Department.

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event that will forever live in infamy, Sept. 11, 2001. Exhibitors who showed up early last year to set up their booths and exhibits were soon shocked by an event that would prove to have international implications. As the terror of the hijacked airplanes over New York City, Arlington, and Shankesville shocked the nation, Gov. Gray Davis advised fairgoers to pack up their belongings for the day. Mourning and fear marked the climate for months after the attacks.

Monday's opening, one day short of the year anniversary, could be described as anything but melancholy.

"There's really no better anti-terrorist activity than attending the fair," said techno-guru Debra Grube, who presided over the agricultural technology exhibit with husband Steve. The couple said they felt great participating in such an American activity.

"Everyone here seems so upbeat and confident," said Steve. "It's a real testament to the sentimental strength of our community."

For Larry Cardon, the date hits close to home. A participant in the fair for more than a decade, Cardon heard the news of the attacks during the morning hours of the 2001 fair's opening preparations.

"I was very alarmed when I found out what happened because I knew my son was working in the Pentagon at the time," Cardon said of his 42-year-old son Edward. Working as Chief-of-Staff for the secretary of the army, Edward worked in the side of the building that was hit by the airplane. He narrowly escaped with his life because an order from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, moments before the attack, brought him out of the office to deliver some needed paperwork. Edward Cardon estimates that he had been out of his office for about eight seconds when the entire wing of the building was destroyed.

"He rushed back into the office and was able to save some of his men, but lost two of them in the fire," said father Larry. "He had nightmares for months after the attack. The loss of two of his men really ate him up."

Cardon said he believes that the United States is a great place and doesn't understand the animosity it confronts with other nations. "We need to find out why they think we're so terrible," said Cardon. "Revenge begets revenge, violence begets violence. We can agree to disagree but we should try to find some common ground."

Young Rafferty Lincoln unveiled his own message for the war on terrorism at the fair. Wearing a Union Army cap dating back to the Civil War, 9-year-old Lincoln captured a first-place prize for his patriotic collection, and honorable mention for his drawings of the American flag and the twin towers. Questioned about the war on terrorism, Lincoln said, "Osama bin Laden better look out."

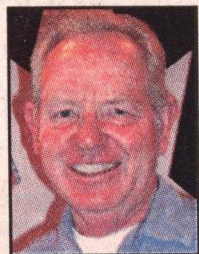
Vaudine Thayer, a fair volunteer, said she believed people were attending the fair not only to have a good time, but to send a message to the terrorists. "They want to intimidate us," Thayer said. "So we need to come out here and show them that we're not afraid. We can't live in fear." Thayer said she believed the current geopolitical climate called for more military action and believed an attack on Iraq was warranted.

Chris "Boots" Wilson said he wasn't convinced America had enough support for an attack on Saddam Hussein. "Perhaps we should have the consent of other countries before we take unilateral action like that," said Wilson. "We're looking for trouble otherwise. We've learned a lot but we've got a long way to go."

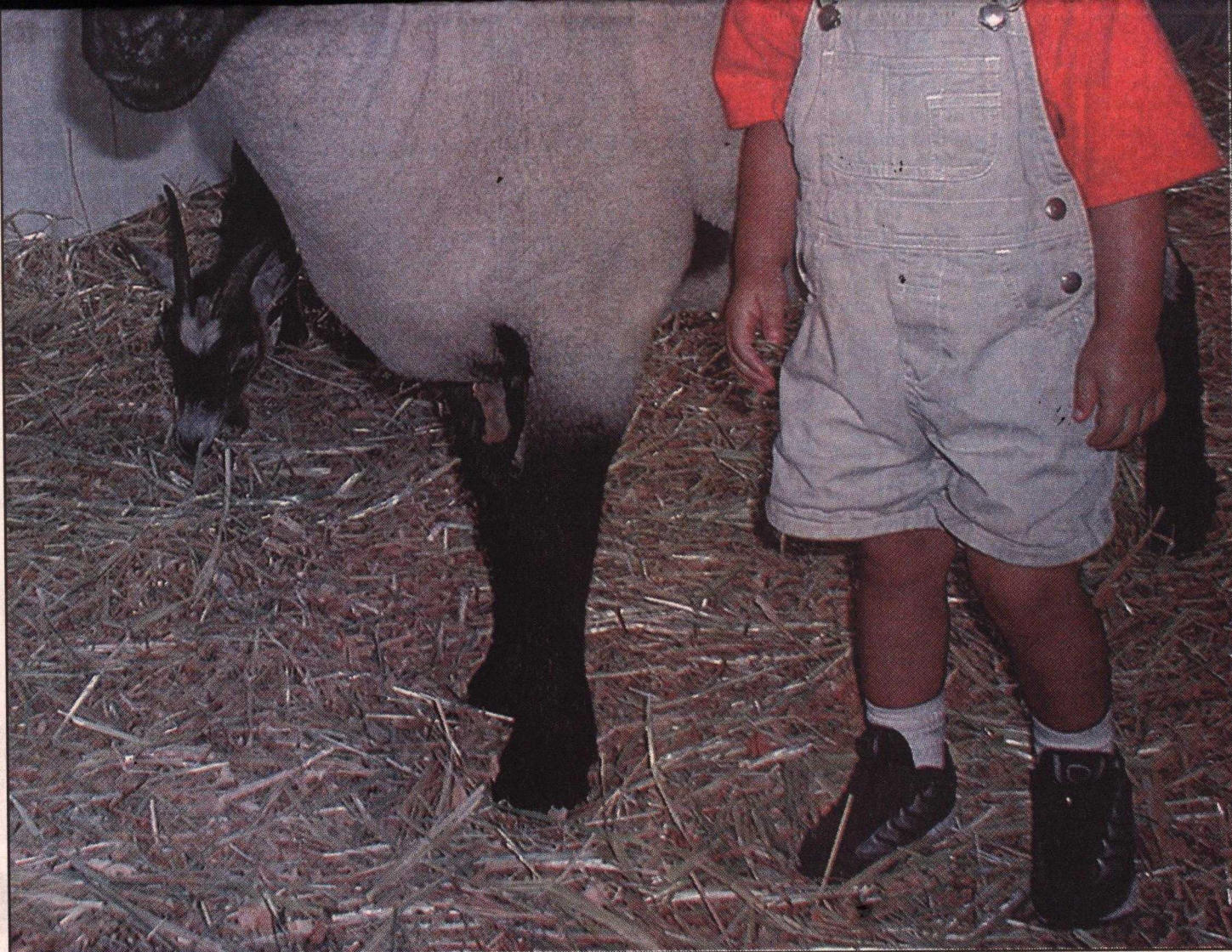
Admiring the yearly harvest of apples, Wilson said the surprise nature of terrorism is what scares him the most. "When it strikes, you really have nowhere to run," he said.

Veronica McRae, a hair stylist from Santa Cruz, said the attacks frightened her, but that she was inspired by the way many participants in the fair used the event as a forum to express their feelings.

"I was talking with my sister Jessica about the attacks and we've noticed how many of these exhibits are based on the attacks. It's amazing how we can express our emotions on such a sensitive subject through things like art and pageantry," McRae said.



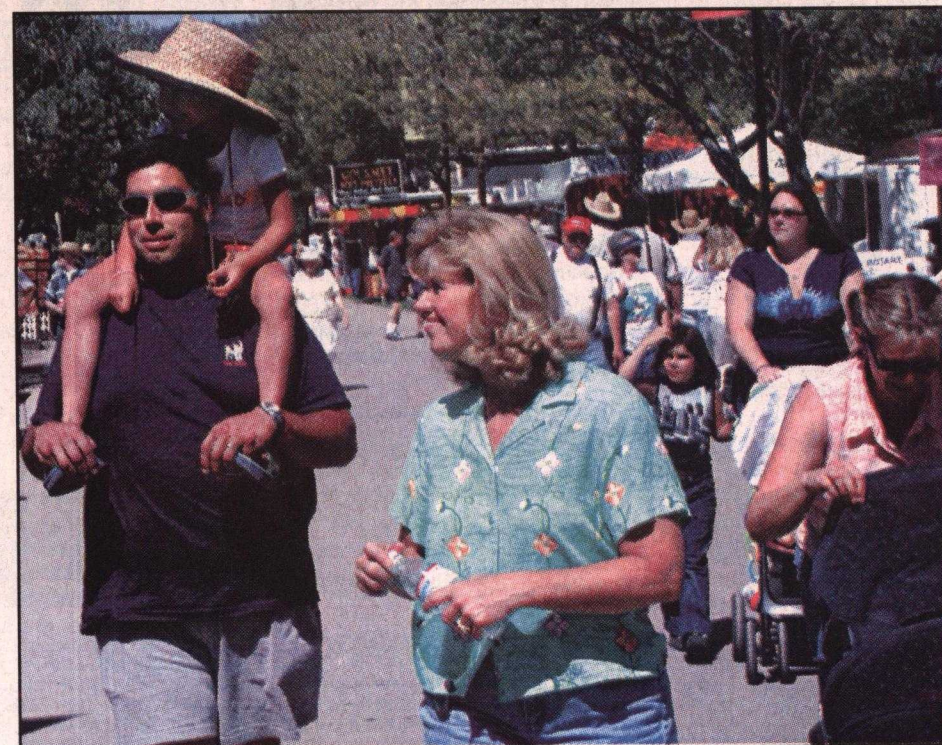
Cardon



Christian Rubio, 2, inspects a lamb in the petting barn at the fair.



Vaudine Thayer displays her patriotic spirit at the fair.



Watsonville firefighter Pablo Barreta carries his daughter, Madison, while in the company of Margie Peixoto (center), and his wife, Kelly (far right) on opening day of the fair.

**Photos by
Tarmo Hannula**