

# Berry, berry celebration



PHOTOS BY JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Suzie Merriam, center, takes a picture with festival goers while dressed as a strawberry at the Strawberry Festival in Watsonville on Saturday.

## Strawberry Festival inspires wide array of food dishes

Events

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By Calvin Men

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**WATSONVILLE** » Jacqueline Bigelow was eager to get her strawberry dessert pizza.

The 35-year-old San Jose mother of two had a variety of strawberry-themed foods to choose from but went with the pizza — a combination of flaky crust, cream and sliced strawberries — because it was appealing.

"It looked good to me," she said.

Bigelow attended the 20th annual Watsonville Strawberry Festival on Saturday with her family and was among the thousands of people perusing the booths at Watsonville Plaza.

The festival continues Sunday.

While there was an array of vendors selling grilled meat

### WATSONVILLE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

**What:** Live music, carnival, games and more to celebrate Watsonville's top crop.

**Where:** Watsonville

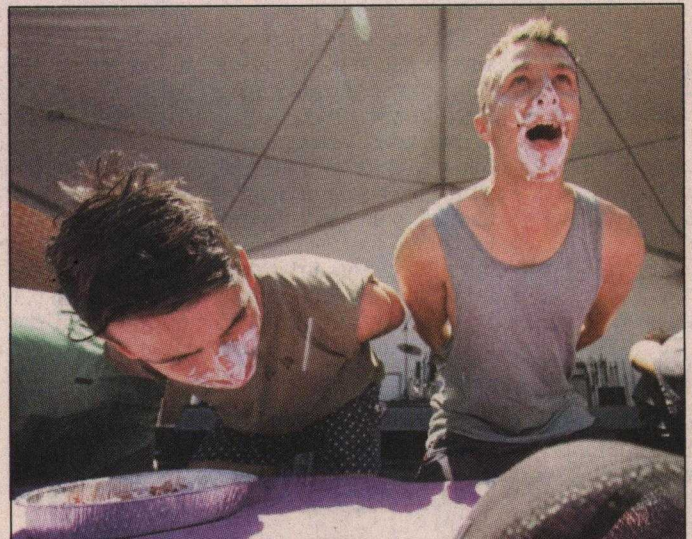
**When:** 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday

**Details:** For information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/kpchjc7>

**+** **Online:** To see a video of the strawberry booths at the festival, visit [santacruzsentinel.com](http://santacruzsentinel.com) and click on this story.

and hawking purses or stuffed animals, the focus was on Main Street in front of the plaza, where there were strawberry-themed dishes galore.

Though some stands kept it simple with plastic cartons of strawberries and strawberry shortcake, there were others that pushed the creative boundaries of strawberry cuisine. The



Edward Irwin, right, and Max Dawolf take a breath during a pie eating competition while on vacation from London in Watsonville at the Strawberry Festival Saturday.

fare included strawberry dessert pizza, strawberries on a waffle, strawberry parfait and even strawberry salsa with chips.

The theme of the festival pays homage to the agriculture roots, with the Watsonville/Salinas region as the largest strawberry

growing area in the state. The crop was valued at more than \$200 million in 2013. Through the end of July, the region produced 57.2 million crates, according to figures provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture

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ture.

Area growers donated more than 1,000 crates of strawberries to non-profit groups at the festival, who quickly turned the fruits into ingredients for dishes.

City Special Events Coordinator Israel Tirado called the event the biggest in the city, saying the "Town comes out to play."

Krystal McCrary, 27, just moved to Watsonville from San Jose six months earlier and was experiencing the festival for the first time.

With her niece and 16-month-old daughter, she said it's likely she'll return next year.

"It's a lot of fun," she said, adding that "there's a good selection of strawberry treats. Always a plus."

McCrary and her niece were holding strawberries parfaits and planned to go on a few of the rides before returning for more strawberry-centered food.

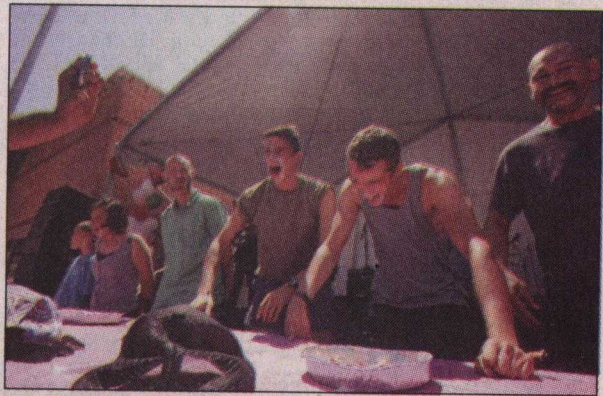
Other parts of the festival included live music, a carnival with rides for children and a swath of other vendors from private companies.

Peggy Talbot, 72, of Soquel was there with her daughter and great grandchildren. Though Talbot has lived in the county since 1970, she's only been to the festival once before.



PHOTOS BY JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

The "Berry-go-round" spins with visitors near the Watsonville Civic Plaza during the Strawberry Festival Saturday.



Competitors, including Edward Irwin, second from right, and Max Dawolf, third from right, react after finishing the strawberry pie eating contest at the Strawberry Festival in

She said she liked that the festival seemed lively but not too crowded. She added that she was likely to attend again next year.

Rich and Ingrid Garcia traveled from Salinas for the festival and were eagerly picking away at a plate with

sausages, bell peppers and onions. But they enjoyed a bit of strawberry preserves before that and planned on sampling a few more dishes before the day's end.

"The creativity at the Strawberry Festival is impressive," Rich Garcia said.