

by festive Fourth



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Aptos Jazz Quartet, riding on flatbed truck Sunday, makes 'world's shortest' Fourth of July parade a blow-out.



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Eileen Reeder of San Ramon, left, takes a spin on the Orbitron at Capitola's Jade Street park. At right, juggler Jeff Raz entertains crowd at Harvey West Park in Santa Cruz.

County united

People from all walks of life brought together by celebration

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APTOS — Even before the ocean fog had cleared, Independence Day was celebrated Sunday by thousands in the county, long before they huddled that night to watch bursts of color explode in the sky.

Freelance fireworks lit up local beaches later in the evening despite authorities' best efforts to confiscate them.

In Aptos, thousands lined Soquel Drive to watch the world's shortest parade. Named for its less than one-mile route through Aptos Village, the parade drew locals, Bay Area folks and several international visitors. Families gathered later in the Village Park for food and entertainment.

Local residents likened Sunday's community spirit to the same unity that joined a community jolted by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

"This is just the way Santa Cruz (county) is — we all get together and have a good time," said Aptos resident Michelle Ashee as she watched the parade. "And when the bad times come, we still get together and help each other out."

Down the road, an estimated

15,000 gathered along Watsonville's Main Street for what festival organizers estimated was the largest Fourth of July celebration in that city.

And with good reason. Though this Pajaro Valley town has featured an Independence Day parade for years, Sunday was the first annual Spirit of Watsonville — a two-day event that included parades, various entertainment on three stages, a fork-lift rodeo and a community ball. Billed as the

Pajaro Valley reunion, its dozens of volunteers say it was a successful effort to bring together a community also fractured by the earthquake and cultural differences.

Once fireworks got started Sunday night, Santa Cruz County Sheriff's deputies adopted a "stand-back-and-watch" strategy throughout the county.

Earlier, fire officials had confiscated a few caches and issued citations, Central District Inspector Chris Holm said.

Popular Twin Lakes State Beach in Live Oak was dotted with bonfires — upwards of 50 — surrounded by groups of people shooting off all types of fireworks, from the so-called "safe-and-sane" variety to full-fledged commercial-quality dis-

plays that fired hundreds of feet into the air.

Bonny Doon Beach and other beaches along the North Coast, traditional trouble spots, were relatively calm, deputies said.

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— Michelle Ashee,
Aptos resident

"In the past, the north areas have been a major problem, we've had acts of violence there but now it's relatively quiet," Lt. Ken Oakes said.

"It's actually going pretty good," Oakes said at Twin Lakes. "We've got a lot of fireworks going on. It's still illegal but the group down here seems to be pretty much under control," he said noting the groups were mostly families.

"We'll let it go a little longer, then go on down and start clearing them out."

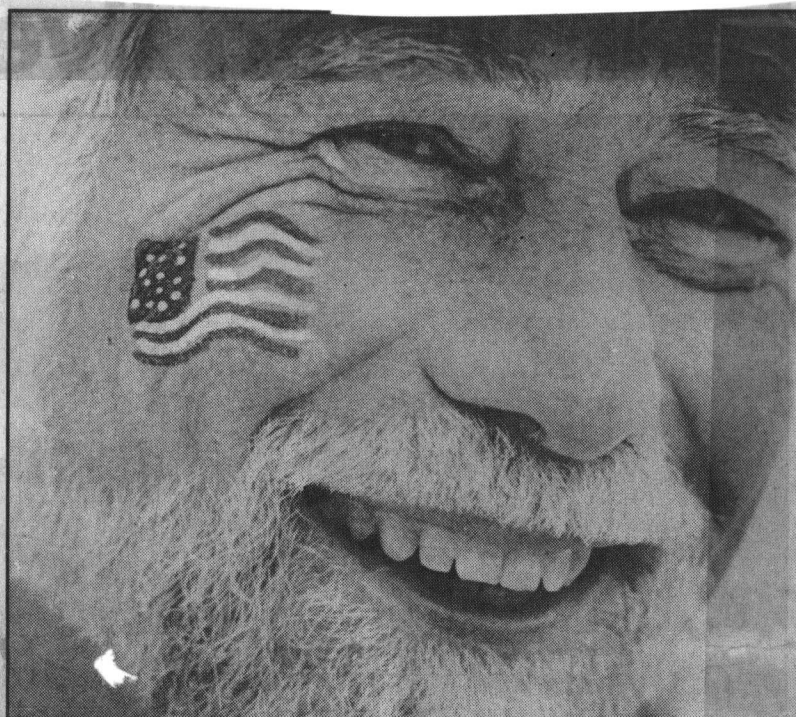
Parade crowd-pleasers in Aptos included a quartet from the former Aptos High Jazz Band, a man flanked by two attractive female mannequins who "walked" alongside him, and Willie, Brat and Harvey, a parrot posse straddling swerving remote-control cars and a Great Dane.

For 8-year-old Michael Sargeant, the best part of the parade was the group sporting fringed, leather vests, bandannas and boots, revin' up their chromed Harley Davidsons, leaving impressed children in their wake.

"I liked when they made that weird sound," said Sargeant, who was visiting his grandmother in Boulder Creek.

The taste of Americana was a treat for several foreigners in the crowd.

Peter Cornelius enjoyed his first Fourth of July parade with a brother and friend who were visiting from his native Germany. A recent Aptos resident who says he plans on participating in next year's parade, Cornelius found the



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Aptos Village parade spectator Charles Wasserman.

flag-waving along the route a curious American tradition.

"To show a German flag is not a cool thing to do — it's too nationalistic," Cornelius said, referring to the recent resurgence in Germany of neo-Nazi groups.

In Watsonville, many city residents like Mercedes Rivera said this was the first year she attended a Fourth of July celebration. Rivera said she was drawn to the downtown plaza when she heard Mexi-

can music would be featured.

Watsonville resident John Zamora, 21, stood with a group of friends who agreed, after checking out the scene, that it was the best Fourth of July celebration they had seen.

"We came for the music, the food — the girls, basically, and to have a good time," Zamora said. "It brings Mexicans and Americans together. After all, we all like the same things — good food and music."