

Gay 'kiss-in' shocks, angers shoppers at Capitola Mall

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In a flamboyant confrontation aimed at erasing bigotry, a raucous group of gay activists turned heads at Capitola Mall on Friday afternoon by staging a demonstration and "kiss-in" during the busiest shopping day of the year.

After a brief march, about 75 members of Queer Nation gathered at the fountain in the center of the normally sedate shopping center. Crooning out yuletide favorites with a twist, they drowned out Nat King Cole, who had been featured on the public address system.

"Deck the malls with queens by golly, fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la."

"Queer tidings we bring to you and your kin, queer tidings for Christmas and a homo new year."

With several hundred people looking on — some gawking, some shouting insults — demonstrators then broke into pairs, leaped onto the fountain and began passionately kissing.

‘Deck the malls with queens by golly, fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la.’

— *Demonstrators' lyrics*

The entire episode lasted about 15 minutes and went off without violence or arrests. For many regular shoppers — family men who buy tires at Sears and couples who frequent the hotdog-on-a-stick franchise, however — the event provided a bizarre change of pace.

"I guess I live a sheltered life," said an exasperated Jim Loucks, a Capitola software engineer and born-again Christian. "I didn't know what they looked like."

Angered by the kissing demonstration, Eric Weitzer and his wife, Leslie, jumped onto a nearby

bench and began kissing in retaliation.

"You don't see straight people coming to the mall and doing this," fumed Weitzer, 27. "It's irritating. They're torturing the traditional songs."

Behind him, a woman moaned: "I think I'm going to throw up my Thanksgiving turkey."

Many of the activists described the event as a playful way of reminding heterosexuals that gay people are a visible segment of the community who are unafraid to stand up and be counted.

"Constant queer visibility will be a potent force to challenge homophobia," said Bill Dunmyer, a 26-year-old graduate history student from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Dunmyer described Queer Nation as a new group formed in Santa Cruz two months ago to combat homophobia and violence against bisexuals, lesbians and gay men.

"Some people have been trained to think homosexuality is revolting," he said.

But the image of men toting handcuffs and women clad in "Dykes from Hell" T-shirts engaging in displays of public affection seemed to win few converts. In fact, it proved unsettling for some shoppers who had come to see Santa. Mall security guards and wary Capitola police stood by fielding complaints and lecturing the irate about the First Amendment.

"We won't have any problems, as long as they keep their clothes

on," said Capitola Police Chief Don Braunton.

That line in the sand was not breached. Most of the protesters were polite and good-natured. In fact, some even boosted merchants' pocketbooks by getting in some early shopping before turning the spotlight on themselves.

"It's fun to go out and play," said Bidy Remick, a 23-year-old Santa Cruz resident and self-described "bisexual feminist witch." "There's so much oppression, so much to be angry about all the time, that it's great to be able to come out and play like this."

Untangling investor's alleged loan scheme

Authorities detail how Irene Mina allegedly lied and juggled loans to buy at least 18 houses since 1987. The story, which first appeared Friday in the Mercury News, is being reprinted on Page 2C because a production error in some editions caused some paragraphs to be printed in the wrong order.