

# The Little Festival That Could

## Boulder Creek Art & Wine Festival Celebrates 20th Anniversary

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Events

by Karen Menehan

Nestled deep within the Santa Cruz Mountains, Boulder Creek is home to an eclectic mix of artists and lumbermen, commuters and retirees. But every year—on Memorial Day weekend—this community comes together to host the Boulder Creek Art & Wine Festival. In 2009 the festival celebrates its 20th anniversary, quite an achievement in light of challenges it has faced.

The festival takes place along the stretch of Highway 9 that runs from one end of Boulder Creek to the other. (Traffic is diverted to side streets.) It is, says promoter Gary Walker, the only Central California festival set in the middle of the redwoods.

Community pride shines through, he adds, in the local arts, crafts, food, beers, wines

and music. Vendors, volunteers and attendees return year after year to this small-town event.

"It's the one time of the year that little Boulder Creek comes alive and we can show off the town—not only to the locals but to outsiders who come to visit," Walker said.

This festival just feels different from others, he added, "because you're in a mountainous setting, no matter which direction you look you're surrounded by the beauty of the mountains—and then you have the whole 'Boulder Creek old logging town meets hippy artists meets entrepreneur spirit from Silicon Valley' thing going."

During last year's festival, Boulder Creek's forest location actually worked against it, Walker said, because of the Summit Fire and other fires

reported in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Although there was no danger to Boulder Creek at the time, attendance was down by a quarter.

Another challenge in years past came in the form of threats from Cal-Trans to shut the festival down, because the state agency opposed people walking around Highway 9 with glasses of wine. The agency has since dropped its complaints.

### Something for Everyone

Today, with 20 years under its belt and its location secure, Walker says the Boulder Creek Art & Wine Festival is a community institution that provides local artists, vintners and musicians an opportunity to showcase their talents and wares.

The mixture of fine art, crafts and imported goods is

also a way this festival differentiates itself, he added.

"Overwhelmingly, we get comments like, 'I'm so glad I came to a show where my wife can go buy a \$200 painting and I can also give my kids 20 bucks and they can go buy a pair of earrings, a fun T-shirt or a hat,'" Walker said. "You can buy cheap tsochkes as well as fine art."

Zayante Vineyards is one of several local wineries that will offer tastings and sales to festival attendees, and has been at the festival since 1989. Co-owner Kathleen Starkey says the festival has a "fun, kind of small-town country feel to it."

This year, attendees who purchase wine-tasting tickets will receive an engraved wine glass that commemorates the festival's 20th anniversary.

Budweiser is the official festival brew, and the Boulder

Creek Brewery will also have micro-brews on hand. Food offerings will range from barbecue to fresh fruit and Mexican to corn on the cob, while musical styles will include rock, folk, bluegrass and blues.

Vendor John Maddox, who owns Imagery Dyes tie-dye clothing company, has participated in the festival since the early 1990s. He says anyone in the mood for an "old-time, intimate feeling" celebration should come on up to the Boulder Creek Art & Wine Festival.

*The Boulder Creek Art & Wine Festival runs Memorial Day Weekend, Saturday, Sunday & Monday, May 23-25 from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Free admission. For more information, visit [www.bcba.net/art-wine.html](http://www.bcba.net/art-wine.html) or email Gary Walker at [gdonwalker@aol.com](mailto:gdonwalker@aol.com).*