



LUCJAN SZEWCZYK — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

The Dombro family of San Jose takes a selfie in the midst of the annual Strawberry Festival on Saturday in Watsonville. The event concludes Sunday.

Events (Festivals, Holidays etc)

Thousands attend Strawberry Festival

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Pajaro Valley staple celebrated in annual gathering in downtown Watsonville

By Michael Todd

*mtodd@santacruzsentinel.com
@michaeltodd on Twitter*

WATSONVILLE » The notoriously popular strawberry pizza — and a crowd of roughly 40,000 — showed up for the 25th annual Watsonville Strawberry Festival on Saturday.

The event, which celebrates the dominant Pajaro Valley crop still being harvested during festivities Saturday, continues Sunday downtown near the central plaza with music starting at 10 a.m. Musical acts, such as Banda Peligro and The Groove Foundation, will perform on one of two stages. One stage is at the beer garden.

Vendors sold strawberry tacos, strawberry shortcake, and strawberries with whipped cream —

scooped from large plastic buckets.

Watsonville's own Corralitos PIZZA provided savory, not sweet, and sweet versions of strawberry pizza. Festival Special Events Coordinator Israel Tirado said the strawberry pizza is an event mainstay that, this year, helped to support the gang intervention and prevention group, the Contigo Program.

"This event celebrates a major industry in the Pajaro Valley," Tirado said. "We are celebrating the community and the families who bring this fruit to our tables."

The Contigo Program's booth was packed with customers wanting to try a slice of the red-topped delicacy. The Contigo Program provides case management, afterschool and summer programs and bonding activities to help children avoid lives of gang activity, according to the program's website.

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Contigo Coordinator Marisol Maciel was working the cash register and said "it's been really busy" at the booth throughout Saturday.

Jose Serna of Watsonville attended the event with his family to enjoy the food.

"We're going to get strawberries with yogurt and granola — oh, yeah," Serna said.

Nearly 100 vendors, including U.S. Army recruit-

ers, barbecue servers and a slew of nonprofits, participated.

Tirado said the event continues to grow.

"Five years ago, there were half the amount of people here," Tirado said.

Marc Mortensen and his family from Modesto traveled to the event to participate. He said one highlight was buying a Monterey Bay Murals T-shirt.

"It's a fun event," Mortensen said.

For information about the festival, visit cityofwatsonville.org.