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# What a night!

## Events

By JOHN ROBINSON  
Sentinel staff writer

### SANTA CRUZ — Wake up.

It's 1995, a new year, the morning after, and time to get started on all the resolutions made last night.

In downtown Santa Cruz the new year was rung in with a party of epic proportions, as thousands of people streamed through the streets and gathered at the Town Clock to participate in the First Night Celebration.

"It's an event, just look at all the people," said Lydia Moore on her way to the Town Clock. "We came here for the excitement."

Shortly before midnight police estimated as many as 7,000 were gathering around the clock for the traditional countdown to the new year.

The non-stop party began with First Night, a non-al-

cohol celebration with performances, concerts, food booths and events at downtown venues that attracted an estimated 10,000 people through the day.

"This is great," said police Sgt. Tom Watson, shortly before midnight. "In years past, we would have people with bottles open up and down the street. I've heard people say this is the best New Year's they have ever had."

Last year, the New Year's celebration was marred, by a mob of youths who rampaged down Pacific Avenue shortly after midnight, shattering windows and throwing stones at police.

Saturday night's crowd however, was well behaved. Only few arrests for drunkenness were reported by police by midnight.

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## New Year's Eve premier event proves popular

By JOHN ROBINSON  
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SANTA CRUZ — As 1994 entered its final hours, a golden sun god came out of the darkness and made its way up Pacific Avenue, while hundreds of people cheered.

The sun god or goddess — such as it might be — could be seen as a symbol of the coming year, and the rebirth of downtown Santa Cruz, as celebrated Saturday during First Night.

The First Night celebration drew an estimated 10,000 people downtown, filling the streets, businesses and theaters. The event featured local artists, performers, a parade, food and whole blocks filled with people having fun.

"It's really neat to see such a cross section of people from all walks of life coming down here," said local resident Brenda Scott-Rogers as she viewed the parade. "You get to see the reconstructed downtown all the way back. It brings tears to my eyes. It has been reborn."

First Night, an alcohol-free community event based on similar celebrations around the country, was considered a huge success and promises to become an annual event.

Many of the childrens' programs, which included mask making, ballet dancers and concerts by performers like Linda Arnold were filled to capacity. Dozens of activities were offered, all leading up to the countdown for the arrival of the New Year at the Town Clock.

"It's really wonderful," said event organizer Trink Bickal. "We expected 5,000 to 8,000 people. The turnout is greater than expected."

Admission to the indoor events was by purchasing a First Night button. By Saturday afternoon 9,000 buttons were sold and no more were available.

Bickal estimated the event raised about \$100,000, and cost \$75,000 to put on. Every artist on the program was paid for their performance, and any extra money will go toward next year's event, Bickal said.

The celebration was a true community event, unmarred by the drinking, violence and increasingly lawless crowd which began to gather at the clock in recent years. After 1994 began with a mini-riot on the

mall that included a spree of window smashing, community members and business people figured 1995 should start differently.

To make sure, nearly 70 police officers were on the mall Saturday night. Their profile was kept low, however, as the streets were filled not with hooligans, but families and happy people.

"It's real nice," said Santa Cruz Police Chief Steve Belcher, walking the mall in his uniform. "We have a little older crowd and it's a really well organized event."

Children were everywhere, bundled up against the wintery night, some still in Christmas colors.

"It's a really good time," said Nikko Van Stolk, an 8-year-old boy, as the 9-foot-tall sun god passed on street, followed by the beating of Japanese drums and twirling dancers. "I made masks. It's really fun."

The idea of First Night was brought to Santa Cruz by Trink and Bob Bickal, who saw a similar celebration in Monterey and thought it would be a good event for Santa Cruz. More than 100 First Night celebrations are held across the country. The original First Night was celebrated in Boston to mark the close of the Bicentennial Year in 1976.

More than 300 volunteers participated and 40 local business and venues sponsored events.

"This is a lot more than just something to do on New Year's," said event volunteer Randi Chazen. "It's all about being with the community. It's good, clean fun."