

Sailing the friendly skies

By TRACIE WHITE
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HE SKIS, snorkels and flies airplanes. But parasailing still made Michael Molesky a little nervous.

"It was pretty spooky," Molesky said. "First thing I know, they're sticking a harness on me. ... I was shaking a little bit hanging onto the handles. The next thing I know I was 100 feet up there just floating. You could see some dolphins, you could see everything."

"It was really a lot of fun," Molesky said. "I was pretty nervous before. Whenever you do something when someone else is in control it's a little nerve-racking."

Molesky, 34, has also been a paraplegic for 20 years and serves as chairman of the Santa Cruz Commission on Disabilities. For his first parasailing experience was off Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf last Sunday.

Molesky took advantage of Pacific Parasail, which has been in business since May. Partners Ian McIntyre and Michael J. Smith attract all variety of potential parasailors from French tourists, to UC Santa Cruz students, to blind and disabled people.

It's a sport that really is for everybody, said McIntyre. There's no skill required.

"It's a really neat thrill to be out of your wheelchair," Molesky said. "It gives you a way to get out and feel like, OK, you're normal. It's a whole other perspective."

Molesky added that no one told him about the parasailing horror stories coming out of Mexican resorts until after he had finished his Santa Cruz flight. Stories about parasailors crashing into buildings in Mex-

ico are fairly common, McIntyre said. But parasailing in Mexico doesn't have much in common with a nice, safe trip from the Santa Cruz wharf, he maintains.

McIntyre, 29, said he and his partner chose the safer method of parasailing for their local operation after working in Hawaii with other companies and studying their options. With Pacific Parasail, the parasailor is hooked into a harness, lifted off a 28-foot speedboat and returned to the boat. Riders do not get wet unless they request it.

"The captain is in complete control," McIntyre said. "It's very safe, and leaves little room for error."

In Mexico, most parasailing operations take off and land on the shore, McIntyre said. "That's much more dangerous. The captain has very little control over takeoffs and landings. You have to steer yourself towards the beach."

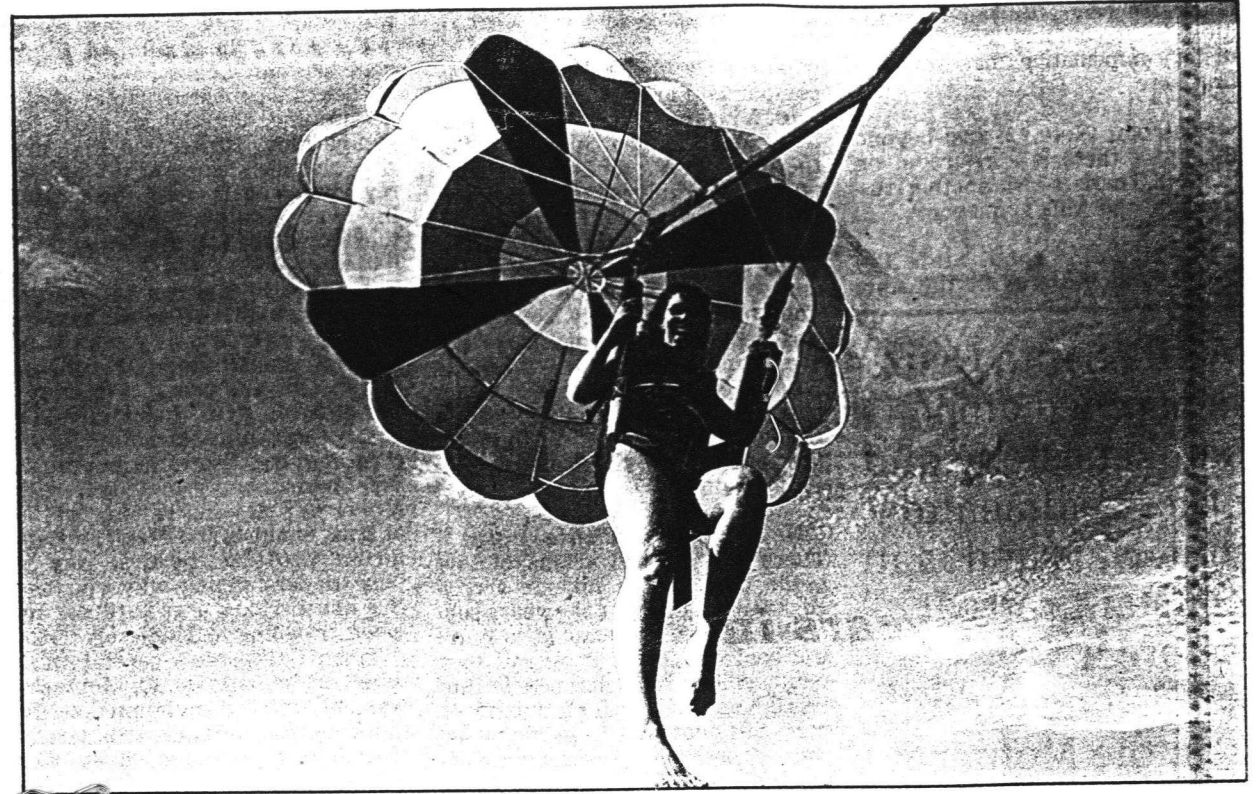
A SANTA CRUZ resident on and off for eight years, McIntyre met his partner while he was working in Hawaii. Smith, 32, said he captained over 15,000 parasailing flights over a three-year period in Maui. The two plan to continue operations year-round, cutting back to weekends and holidays at the end of the season. The \$40 flights are open to anyone over 12 years old, seven days a week, weather permitting. Pacific Parasailing won't fly in winds greater than 25 to 30 knots, McIntyre said. The flight lasts about 20 minutes.

McIntyre, a longtime surfer and sailer, used to lead whale-watching expeditions and run sailing charters in Santa Cruz and Hawaii. Parasailing was simply a natural extension of that.

"It's a tame sport," he said.

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A harness and high hopes accompany Teri Costa, 23, of Fresno, as she takes her turn.

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Parasailing

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Parasailing is also a business on the brink of expansion throughout California, McIntyre added. Catalina, Long Beach and Santa Barbara are just a few of the new spots experimenting with the sport. The biggest roadblock to the success of the business is the high cost of insurance, McIntyre said.

The city of Santa Cruz requires Pacific Parasail to hold \$2 million in liability insurance. The city also takes 18 percent of the profits.

The boat is required to stay 1,000 feet offshore and 300 feet from the kelp beds.

"We realize we're in the spotlight," McIntyre said. "We don't have any more impact (on the environment) than any recreational boater."

Dornettee Shoemaker, recreation superintendent for the city's parks and recreation department, said she began investigating the possibility of bringing a parasailing operation to the wharf about two years ago.

"We were looking at ways of generating more revenue in the beach area and enhancing the beach area," Shoemaker said.

"Our initial concern was safety. In the old days just the mention of parasailing brought visions of being hooked up on the beach, dug through the sand and, hopefully by time you hit the water, you would take off." Pacific Parasail's proposal of using the mid-boat launch and retrieval method was very attractive, Shoemaker said. "People should not even get wet."

"They were really interested in offering specials for local people, and reduced rates for disabled people," Shoemaker said. Pacific Parasail also contacted environmental groups for advice, which impressed the city.

"For the first season it seems to be going well," Shoemaker said. The city hopes that the colorful parachutes will continue to attract tourists to the wharf and influence them to spend an extra dollar while there.

The city also hopes that Pacific Parasailing will fare better than the first parasailing venture in the county which began business in the summer of 1980 in Capitola and closed a few months later, claiming the weather conditions were just too rough.