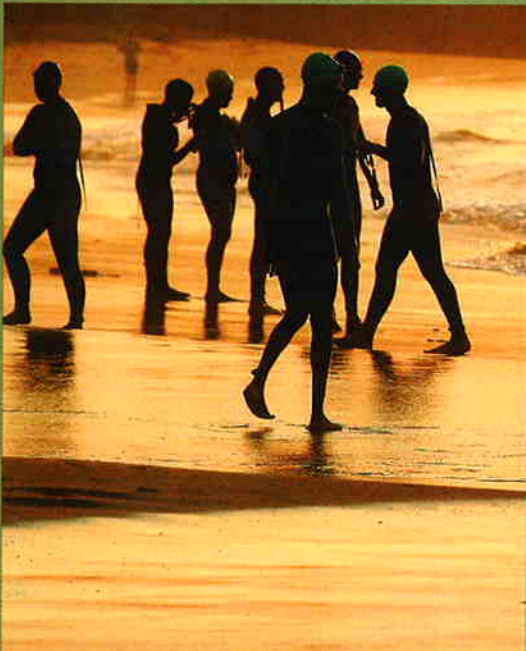


Santa Cruz County
**Community Assessment
Project**



Summary Report 2006



YEAR 12



New Community Goals Reflect Residents' Changing Perspectives



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Twelve years ago, the United Way of Santa Cruz County and local leaders in public and private health, education, human service and civic organizations met to discuss how citizens could shape the future of Santa Cruz County.

The result was the Community Assessment Project (CAP), whose goal is to continually improve the quality of life for Santa Cruz County residents. The philosophy is that an organized, collaborative, community-wide approach could positively affect important aspects of community life so that growth and change would not be left to chance. Our job as the CAP Steering Committee has been to attempt to provide the most relevant insight about the needs of residents in order to point the community toward specific initiatives that will positively impact all residents.

In 2006, new Community Goals for the Year 2010 were set. Local organizations surveyed county residents to find out what was on their minds in terms of education, economy, health, natural environment, public safety and social environment.

The result of that survey and the ensuing Community Goals can be seen in the following pages, as we look to data from years past as a gauge of where we are—and what needs to be done to achieve the new goals set for the year 2010.

Thanks to the involvement of residents in surveys and discussions, these Community Goals are more true to the community than ever before. The six champion organizations—Ecology Action, Cabrillo College, Santa Cruz County Probation Department, Volunteer Center, Workforce Investment Board and Health Improvement Partnership—took local voices to heart in establishing the goals that will lead Santa Cruz County through the next four years.

But setting those goals is not enough. We must use the information at hand to find ways to work to achieve what we set in motion. It's up to community leaders and local residents to find ways to make a difference in our county, to see these goals from idea to reality.

We welcome everyone's help in this ambitious undertaking. To find out how to get involved, visit www.unitedwaysc.org and www.santacruzcountycap.org.

-CAP Steering Committee

Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project



Summary Report 2006

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Bridging the Gap Between High School and a College Education



COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, more students will be working at grade level with a curriculum that spirals in rigor throughout the K-14 system.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, more students will be ready for college and transfer-ready from the community college into four-year colleges and universities.

Goal 3

By the year 2010, more schools will have a pre-kindergarten program available for all children.

Local schools provide quality education in a safe environment, despite inadequate funding

Santa Cruz County schools are continuing to feel the impact of changing demographics and shrinking enrollment. And, as budgets become increasingly constrained by spiraling per-pupil expenditures, concerns over funding are escalating. However, in spite of rising costs and declining enrollment, academic performance has largely been consistent, with most scores outperforming the California average, and the majority of schools climbing in their statewide ranking.

Enrollment levels in County schools are reflected in the falling enrollment in the post-secondary system. As indicated by Brian King, President, Cabrillo College, "With the flattening of the K-12 population and the decline in high-school graduates, Cabrillo's enrollment has been adversely impacted, and this year, with the introduction of the new California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), the graduation stakes are even higher, with one more layer of testing to affect graduation outcomes."

The results of the 2006 CAHSEE testing have not yet been released, but there is wide belief that the new exam may result in a smaller percentage of high-school students attaining their diplomas and being eligible to graduate. "In order to help bridge the gap for non-graduating students, Cabrillo College is refining its program of remedial classes to get high-school students back on track for a college education," said Dr. King.

Another demographic affecting the classroom is the epic rise of the ethnic group that now commands the largest share of the County school system. The Latino community today accounts for 49.5 percent of the County's classrooms. As a result, provision for cultural diversity and consideration of English learners are key in creating a successful learning environment in both K-12 and post-secondary education.

Percent of Students by Ethnicity

Source: California Department of Education, 2005

Note: Starting in 1998-99, enrollment figures include California Youth Authority (CYA) schools. Starting in 2000-01, enrollment figures include State Special Schools. "Multiple or No response" was added as a category in 1998/99.

ETHNICITY	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
American Indian	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5
Asian	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.1
Pacific Islander	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
Filipino	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
Hispanic or Latino	44.0	44.7	46.0	46.9	47.5	48.5	49.6	49.5
African American	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.5
White (non-Hispanic)	49.8	49.2	48.1	46.9	46.2	44.4	43.2	42.8
Multiple or no response	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.4	2.2	1.9	2.3
Total County Enrollment	40,512	40,706	40,462	39,954	39,427	39,140	38,358	38,555

Dr. King hails sensitivity to cultural diversity as one of the key ingredients in the future success of Cabrillo College, and recognizes the shift in the classroom as a landmark event. "Cabrillo is committed to meeting the needs of a diverse student body", said Dr. King, "and we're ensuring that the faculty members we bring on board are representative of the ethnic and minority groups within our student population."

Cabrillo College has taken extra steps to bridge the gap between high school and college for a special community. Santa Cruz County's at-risk population of those who, for a variety of economic and social reasons, have failed to make the grade at school, now have a vehicle to boost their potential to succeed in college and find a meaningful career. Pioneered by Program Director Diego "James" Navarro, Cabrillo's Digital Bridge Academy (DBA) was founded in 2002 to transform the lives of young adult underachievers, largely from the Latino community, into dedicated students with ambition, self-worth, and the skills to launch them into successful careers.

"The DBA program has gone beyond anything I imagined it could be, and has taken on a life of its own," said Mr. Navarro.

Inspired by his own path through community college and subsequent Harvard education, Mr. Navarro used his experience as an industrial researcher at Hewlett-Packard to design the Academy's innovative curriculum. The DBA utilizes a two-step process to first help students visualize themselves succeeding, and then to launch an accelerated, intensive study program—just one semester long—to prepare them for college.

With a renewed focus on cultural diversity and easing the transition between high school and college, Cabrillo College is poised to meet the changing educational needs of the Santa Cruz community. "Santa Cruz County is generally a well-educated county," said Dr. King, "and Cabrillo is focused on closing the gap between high school and college by partnering closely with local schools and UCSC. Our vision is a seamless web of education all the way from preschool to post-graduate study."

Experts also hope to rebound from the defeat of Proposition 82, the "preschool-for-all" initiative on the June 2006 ballot. If funding is found from another source, educators are confident that the CAP goal of providing a pre-kindergarten program for all students can be met.

"I think it's important that people understand that the cost in 2005 for full-time licensed child care was about \$10,000 a year," said Vicki Boriack, program officer for First 5 Santa Cruz County. "That's higher than the state average, in addition to the higher cost of living here in Santa Cruz. We're really putting families in jeopardy of choosing a lower-quality daycare facility that doesn't prepare their child for school."

To help close the gap on meeting this goal, Ms. Boriack recommends residents support preschool legislation in the future.

"We know that children who go to preschool are more likely to graduate high school and to go on to college," she said. "Those things are good for the work force and for crime rates."

Diversity Is Key for Long-Term Economic Health



COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, the annual Median Family Income will increase by a higher percentage than the Bay Area Consumer Price Index.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, housing will be available and affordable to meet the needs of the local workforce.

Goal 3

By the year 2010, county performance in key economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism and retail will meet or exceed the state average.

Main industries soar, but housing costs continue to be a problem

Any good stockbroker will emphasize the importance of portfolio diversity. It's an economic plan designed to avoid putting all an investor's monetary eggs in the same basket.

Experts say Santa Cruz County has a growing workforce and a strong base economy, but needs to diversify that workforce before achieving goals set for the year 2010.

"If we have the ability for the economy to grow beyond what's typical for this area—obviously tourism, agriculture and retail will continue to be strong—our confidence in these goals would be greater," said Tom O'Shea, senior vice president with Benchmark Hospitality at Chaminade in Santa Cruz.

However, Jess Brown, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, pointed out that community members are better off in a county with three strong industries, rather than relying on a single one.

"And all three of those are tax-producing industries," he said. "They're providing a tax base for this area. Governments and schools, for instance, are providing a service, but no tax."

Mr. Brown believes that the county could achieve its goal regarding the Median Family Income. In 2005, 39.8 percent of residents polled indicated they felt better off financially than in years past, up a whopping 12.3 percent from 2003's 27.5 percent of satisfied locals.

However, despite the recent optimism, the high costs of housing continue to be problematic, said Mr. Brown. "The goal relating to housing is a very difficult one, because we have a lot of entry-level jobs here," he said. "That's something that's going to have to be grappled with, but it's more about looking for alternatives, like higher densities and smaller housing units, rather than just trying to do subsidized projects."

And the more Santa Cruz County relies on lower-paying industries such as retail, tourism and agriculture (in 2005, local cashiers earned a median hourly wage of \$9.43), the more pressure will be exerted on the rental housing market, said Mr. O'Shea.

He noted that the technology sector took one of the biggest hits from 1996 to 2005, shrinking by 33 percent. The loss of jobs includes the loss of the area's highest salaries, with computer software engineers making a median hourly wage of \$42.90 in 2005. Those in arts, design, entertainment, sports and media pulled in roughly \$18.01 per hour, and office clerks made \$12.71.

"If you're creating jobs that pay a salary that's commensurate with what the community needs to support buying a home, and that provides basics like benefits and a 401(k), then clearly that job has so much more to offer than the 30-hour-a-week seasonal job," Mr. O'Shea said. "Seasonal jobs put tremendous pressure on the rental market, driving the costs up so that the guy who was paying \$1,500 a month to rent is now paying \$1,800."

The Santa Cruz-Watsonville area is the second least affordable in the nation for home-buying, where only 8 percent of homes are affordable for median income families. Rents continue to rise, too, with two-bedroom homes going for a fair-market rent of \$964 in 1997 and \$1,347 in 2005. More than 41 percent of survey respondents in 2005 said that half or more of their income is spent on housing.

On the bright side, the benchmark goal seeking to surpass state performance in key Santa Cruz County industries is achievable, said Mr. Brown.

"It just came out for the first time this year that we have the second-highest value per acre of crops anywhere in California," he said, referring to a study done by the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner's Office. "When you look at the fact that we're the second-smallest county in the state, that's a huge achievement."

In 2005, berry crops brought nearly \$253 million to Santa Cruz County, while raspberries alone produced more than \$112 million—a 454-percent increase from 1996.

The continued high performance of the three major county industries is not a surprise, Mr. O'Shea said. From 1995 to 2004, the annual taxable retail sales in Santa Cruz County grew by 51.2 percent, close to the state's growth rate of 66.2 percent. Agricultural production value grew by 69 percent from 1996 to 2005, while tourism dollars grew by 63 percent from 1995 to 2004.

"We'll continue, obviously, to be strong in agriculture, tourism and retail," he said. "But that in and of itself simply may not be sufficient."

Percent of Homes Affordable for Median Income Families

Source: National Association of Home Builders, NAHB - Wells Fargo Housing Opportunity Index (HOI), First Quarter, 2006

METRO AREA	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Santa Cruz/Watsonville	35.4	34.3	32.0	14.2	9.6	8.0	14.5	15.2	7.7	5.9
Salinas	36.8	39.1	41.3	21.2	14.5	7.7	6.1	12.7	4.3	5.0
San Jose	39.4	41.7	41.0	18.3	14.5	20.1	35.7	32.6	19.5	14.9
San Francisco	23.0	24.8	21.3	10.3	7.3	9.2	16.5	16.2	10.4	7.8
Nation	66.5	67.6	69.6	62.8	56.9	64.8	58.9	61.2	50.1	41.3



COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, Santa Cruz County residents will have improved access to primary, specialty and emergency medical services. Appropriate planning and training will have been accomplished for medical response to disasters.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, 80 percent of healthcare providers will use Health Information Technology to improve patient safety, enhance healthcare systems efficiency and provide community-wide secure health data to improve population health for Santa Cruz County residents.

Goal 3

By the year 2010, 75 percent of Santa Cruz County residents over the age of 60 will receive education and information regarding end-of-life choices and opportunities, thus empowering them to make self-determined decisions regarding health care.

Goal 4

By the year 2010, the prevalence of childhood obesity in Santa Cruz County will be reduced by 5 percent.

The Health of Santa Cruz County Is Looking up

With CAP health goals that deadline in 2010—just four years away—looming overhead, experts say that residents and healthcare facilities have spent the past 10 years working to improve access issues and overall health throughout the county.

While some areas still need work, experts agree that the county is well on track to meeting its goals for 2010.

Goal 1: Improved access to health care

Martina O'Sullivan, Director of Community Engagement for Dominican Hospital, said she was glad to see the continued, though modest, rise in access to health care among residents.

"I was absolutely stunned to see that 86.5 percent of residents in 2005 had a regular source of health care," she said. "When you work in the industry and are more acutely aware of what the needs of overall health care are in a community, that number surprised me."

Although that number means more than 10,000 county residents still do not have a regular source of health care, the percentage has increased from 82.9 percent in 1995 and even 84.6 percent in 2003.

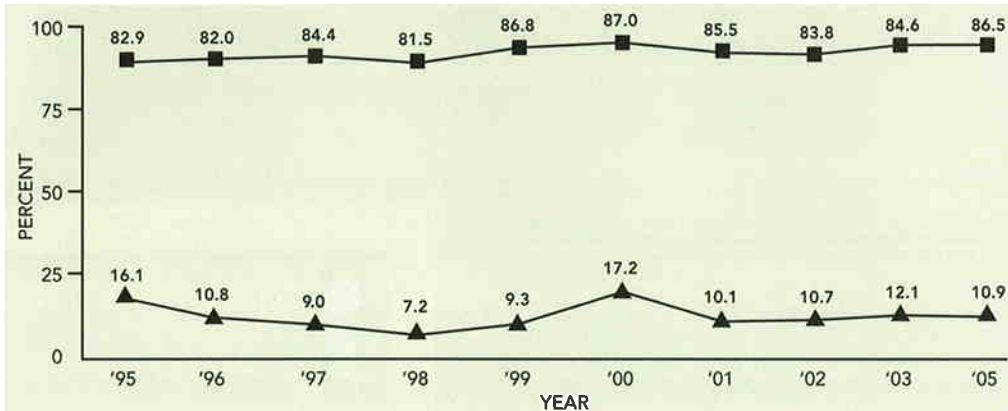
Rama Khalsa, Director of Health Services Agency, Santa Cruz County, agreed that the increase shows that residents are headed in the right direction.

"There are some really scary statistics related to people not having insurance delaying care and, frankly, dying unnecessarily of diseases like cancer, serious cardiac disorders, strokes, lung disorders and diabetes," Ms. Khalsa said. "They make their conditions much, much worse by delaying care."

Much of the credit for the increase in health care access belongs to groups like Healthy Kids, which focuses on giving help to uninsured children in Santa Cruz County through a private-public collaboration of not-for-profit agencies and healthcare providers.

Who Has Health Insurance?

- Yes, I have a regular source of health care
- ▲ Yes, I needed health care and was unable to receive it



“There are some really scary statistics related to people not having insurance delaying care and, frankly, dying unnecessarily of diseases like cancer, serious cardiac disorders, strokes, lung disorders and diabetes.”

—Rhama Khalsa
Health Services Agency
Santa Cruz County

Goal 2: Health information technology

Healthcare facilities and providers are making a switch from paper records to more easily transferred electronic ones. As more physicians and hospitals make the change, the goal for compliance by 2010 is still in sight, Ms. Khalsa said.

“Many of our community clinics and private physician offices are finally getting online with electronic health records,” she said. “Because of the change, we’re able to more easily coordinate care.”

Dominican Hospital implemented the CareConnect system in January, providing an electronic link between bedside charts and the hospital’s pharmacy, laboratory, radiology department and other groups. The CareConnect system also includes Computerized Physician Order Entry.

“CareConnect is one way that we at Dominican Hospital are using and implementing all of these goals,” Ms. O’Sullivan said.

Goal 3: End-of-life information and education

With the fresh and tragic example of Terry Schiavo, a Florida woman diagnosed as being in a persistent vegetative state who captured national attention from 2003 to 2005 as her husband and parents battled each other over end-of-life decisions, the availability of information and education on the subject has a heightened importance.

“We want people—young and old—to know and to tell us what their feelings would be on heroic medical care, such as life-support,” Ms. Khalsa said, noting that a community-wide educational effort has already begun. “Hospice has a grant to work with all physicians’ offices and the community at large to get these end-of-life wishes documented in advanced directives for the whole community.”

Legislation has helped healthcare facilities meet this goal, Ms. O’Sullivan said.

“At least in the last 10 years, all hospitals have had to implement education on Do-Not-Resuscitate orders,” she said. “There are mandated systems in place where we have to inform patients of their rights on end-of-life issues and we offer periodic seminars for the public, but it needs to start at the community level. This is about how we are going to take care of ourselves to make our decisions known.”

Goal 4: Childhood obesity

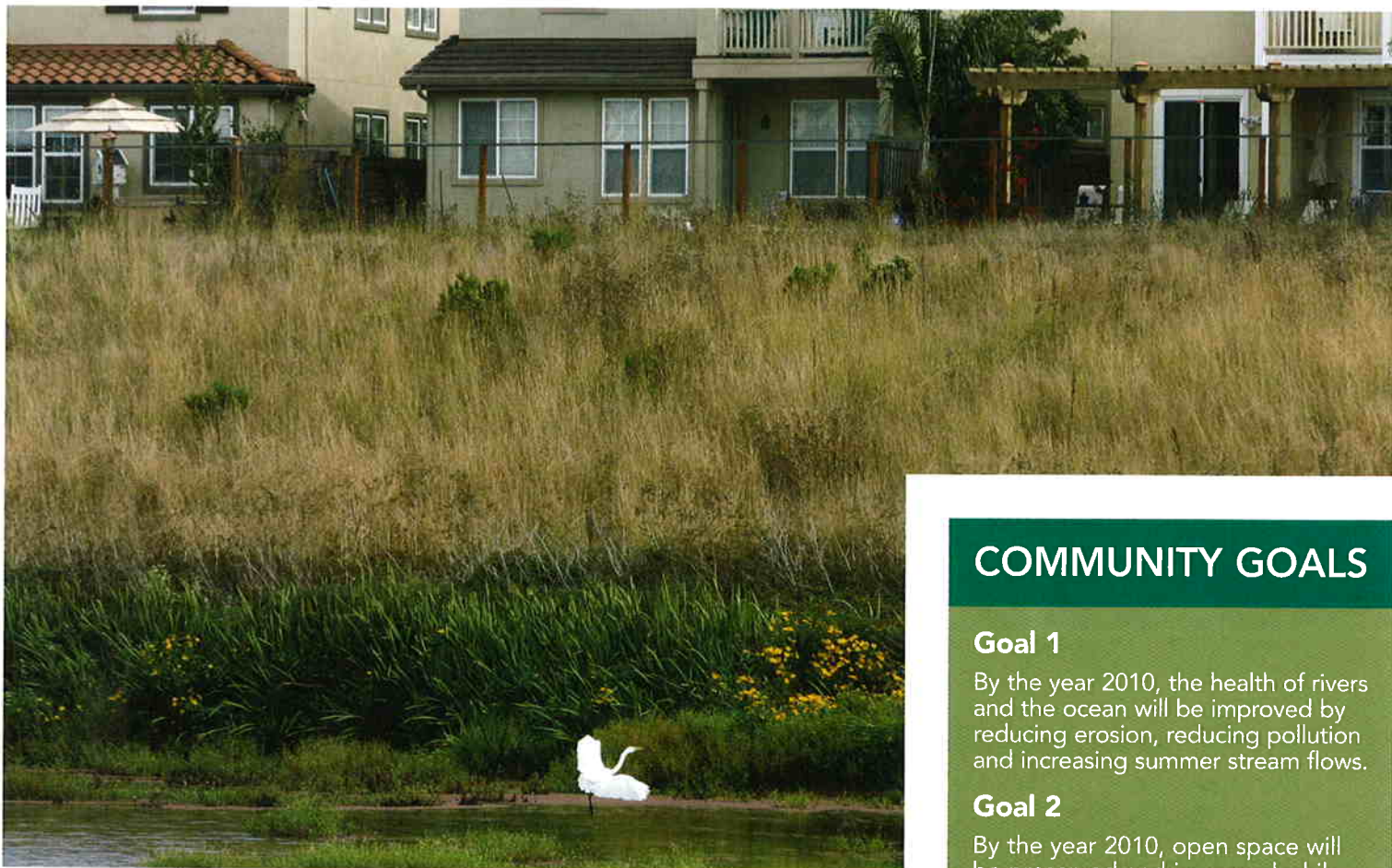
The dangers of childhood obesity are well-known: type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, sleep apnea, stomach and pancreas disease, liver and gall bladder disease, increased cardiovascular risk factors and early arthritis, to name a few.

In 2001, 14.1 percent of adolescents in Santa Cruz County were obese, compared to 12.2 percent statewide. Experts are determined to get the community’s commitment to change this statistic for the better by 2010.

“We saw the warning signs last year, but we’re really not doing well,” said Ms. Khalsa. “If we look at it as a community effort and engage parents—who, after all, do buy and cook a good part of the food that children eat—that would be helpful. Everyone needs to step up to the plate on this one.”

But with the number of groups in the community seeking to address childhood obesity, including the United Way’s “Go For Health” project and Santa Cruz County’s “Superstar Nutrition for Kids,” the county is taking steps in the right direction, Ms. O’Sullivan said.

“It’s doable, but how do we bring the whole community along?” she asked. “As in many of the healthcare indicators, issues of poverty, culture and awareness are important factors. If you can bring the awareness there and encourage residents to think in another way, it’s possible to meet this goal.”



Watsonville Takes on the Environment

COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, the health of rivers and the ocean will be improved by reducing erosion, reducing pollution and increasing summer stream flows.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, open space will be preserved and increased while the percentage of housing units which are environmentally sound, green, affordable, and near transit and job centers are increased.

Goal 3

By the year 2010, single-passenger auto use will be reduced by improving cyclist safety, increasing miles of bike lanes and increasing use of public transportation.

A growing city is taking CAP's goals to heart as it looks to the future

Watsonville, an expanding city with a high Latino and agricultural worker population, is keeping its focus on the environment as it looks toward the future.

The city's Web site puts its population at 49,601 as of January 2005, nearing Santa Cruz's 56,300 residents as of 2004, according to the Santa Cruz city's site. As the area grows, Mayor Antonio Rivas says the city council tries to keep development in line with local environmental goals.

The city has approved a new recycling plant and waste-water treatment plant, Rivas said. A planned development for 85 acres will have 25 acres of open space. City officials plan to use solar energy to power a new senior center being developed. And the list goes on.

"We're trying to have a 'green' city," Mr. Rivas said. "We're very conscious of the idea of sustainable communities."

County residents as a whole appear to have a heightened awareness of environmental issues, said Kirsten Liske, vice-president of pollution prevention and zero-waste programs for Ecology Action.

"The top three concerns of the general community—water pollution, traffic and development of open space—lined up exactly with the outcomes of the goal-setting process that we just underwent," she said, noting that the CAP environmental goals are new this year.

Water quality

Santa Cruz County is a leader in championing water quality in the state, Ms. Liske said, and efforts need to be made to continue to collect data that will help residents and leaders become even more effective in reaching this goal.

"A lot is being done for water quality," she said. "Santa Cruz County can be proud that in the '90s it was the first community to come up with a water-quality action plan for the San Lorenzo River."

Watsonville is doing its best to contribute to increased water quality by working with a consultant to move toward 100-year levee protection, Mr. Rivas said.

"Our residents are asking for it, and we don't want to have another flood," he said. "If we improve the levee, we can improve the fish and game area as well as the farmland. Once we've improved all the areas in our city that rivers come through on the way to the ocean, we won't be sending a lot of junk along with the water."

Open space/green housing

Santa Cruz County continues to advocate for open space, with 377.1 acres of open space added to county land in 2005.

"Santa Cruz County has historically done an excellent job of ensuring that we have ample open space for our community," Ms. Liske said. "It's one of the reasons it's so great to live here, all the access to parks, and it's great in the long run for water supply."

Open space in the form of land trusts—when private parties and public agencies come together to permanently protect land through purchase or donation—also increased in 2005, by 379 acres.

Additionally on the climb is a trend toward philosophically embracing "green housing." However, as we move forward, the CAP and community will need to address the idea of 'green' housing and what exactly that is, Ms. Liske said.

Auto use

In 2006, recreation trails were lengthened by 15 miles overall in Santa Cruz County, and bikeway miles jumped from 84 in 2002 to 99.7 in 2005. But still, just 21.2 percent of county residents reported "frequently" using transportation other than a personal automobile.

"It's challenging that the No. 2 answer in the community survey to 'What would encourage you to use public transportation?' is 'Nothing,'" Ms. Liske said. "That's a problem. It's not just that Santa Cruz County residents are being cranky, it's just that our society evolved around the automobile."

Roadway congestion between Watsonville and Santa Cruz is well-known among community members, Mr. Rivas said, and there's a lot of work to be done before the traffic load is alleviated. Watsonville is starting by constructing two bridges to help the flow of transportation in the city.

"In Santa Cruz County and especially in Watsonville, I think we're doing great in our efforts to protect the environment," he said. "Plans are in place."

Open Space – Acreage

Source: Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Sempervirens Fund, Trust for Public Lands, County of Santa Cruz Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services, City of Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department, City of Scotts Valley Parks Department, and City of Watsonville Parks and Recreation Department, 2006.

TOTAL OPEN SPACE ACRES IN COUNTY	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total Acres in County	286,739	286,739	286,739	286,739	286,739	286,739	286,739
Percent Open Space Acres	4.4	4.7	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.1
County Population	255,100	257,100	258,400	259,800	260,200	260,240	262,351
Open Space Acres per 1,000 residents	52.9	55.3	55.8	55.0	55.0	55.3	56.3

Population figures for 1999-2003: State of California, Department of Finance, Revised Historical City, County and State Population Estimates, 1991-2000, with 1990 and 2000 Census Counts, Sacramento, California, March 2002. Population figures for 2004-2005: State of California Department of Finance, E-4 Population Estimates for Cities, Counties and the State, 2001-2005, with 2000 DRU Benchmark, Sacramento, California, 2005.



COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, crime within Santa Cruz County will continue to decrease and residents will have increased confidence in their personal safety at home and in the community.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, children in Santa Cruz County will live in safer families and communities.

Child Abuse Rates Are on the Rise

Experts are concerned that an increase in some crimes is sending the county in the wrong direction

Santa Cruz County residents seem to be well on their way to meeting the first CAP goal for public safety—having increased confidence in their public safety—but local experts aren't sure the numbers are adding up.

While community members say they are less concerned about crime and safety than they were 11 years ago, reports of rape and child abuse are up and some law-enforcement response times are down.

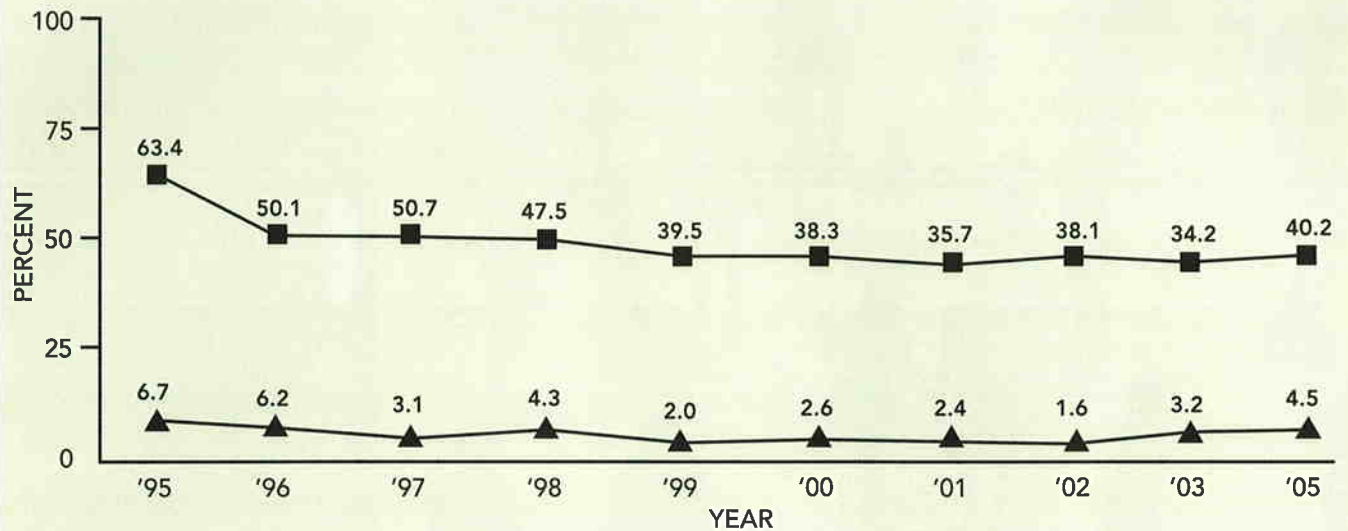
In 2005, 40.2 percent of residents confessed to being concerned about local crime. That's down from 63.4 percent in 1995, but an increase from the low 34.2 percent from 2003. And in 2005, police and fire response times were lengthened. In 1998, the average response time from the Santa Cruz Police Department for a Priority 1 call (for assistance that involves a person or an accident) was 3 minutes and 59 seconds. In 2005, that went up to 4 minutes and 25 seconds. In Watsonville, the average response time for emergency calls to the fire department was 5 minutes and 13 seconds—up 1 minute 8 seconds from 2002.

"That's concerning," said Heidi Simonson, attorney for the Baskin and Grant Law Firm and chairperson of the Santa Cruz County Domestic Violence Commission.

Ms. Simonson was also concerned about the rising incidents of rape in Santa Cruz County. With 66 rapes reported in 1996 and 112 reported in 2005, that's a whopping 69.7 percent increase.

Concern about Crime and Neighborhood Safety

- I am very concerned about crime
- ▲ I do not feel safe at all in my neighborhood



She also pointed out that individuals are feeling less safe in their neighborhoods—just 68.1 percent of respondents indicated they felt very safe in 2005.

“One thing I noticed is numbers for people who feel safe vary by age groups,” she said. “The younger age groups that are out more feel less safe. The older community, who may be at home more, feel more safe. For individuals to feel safer, we need to reach out to our neighbors. We’re less likely to commit a crime against our neighbor if we know them and we’re more likely to report a crime against our neighbor if we know them.”

Just 57.9 percent of individuals age 18 to 24 said they felt very safe, whereas 77 percent of those 65 and older felt the same way.

“There’s a real culture of fear,” Ms. Simonson said. “There’s so many things to be afraid of—the poisonous bottle in your kitchen cabinet and the neighbor who doesn’t look like you and the backpack left out in the park that might contain explosives. We’re constantly educated on things to be afraid of, and we’re much less educated on how to reach out to our neighbors and make our neighborhoods safer.”

But most upsetting to public safety experts was the increase in cases of general neglect of children, up 36.4 percent from 1998 to 2005, said Susan True, executive director of First 5 Santa Cruz County.

“Our child abuse/neglect rates are higher than the state average,” she said, noting that 14.2 child abuse cases per 1,000 children were reported in Santa Cruz County in 2005,

as opposed to 11.3 for California. “That’s something many people find distressing. We really need to rethink that and know that preventing abuse is the responsibility of everyone in the county.”

The rising general neglect cases—which dropped to 199 in 2002 and increased to 343 in 2004—show that Santa Cruz County is moving further from its goal of increasing child safety in the community.

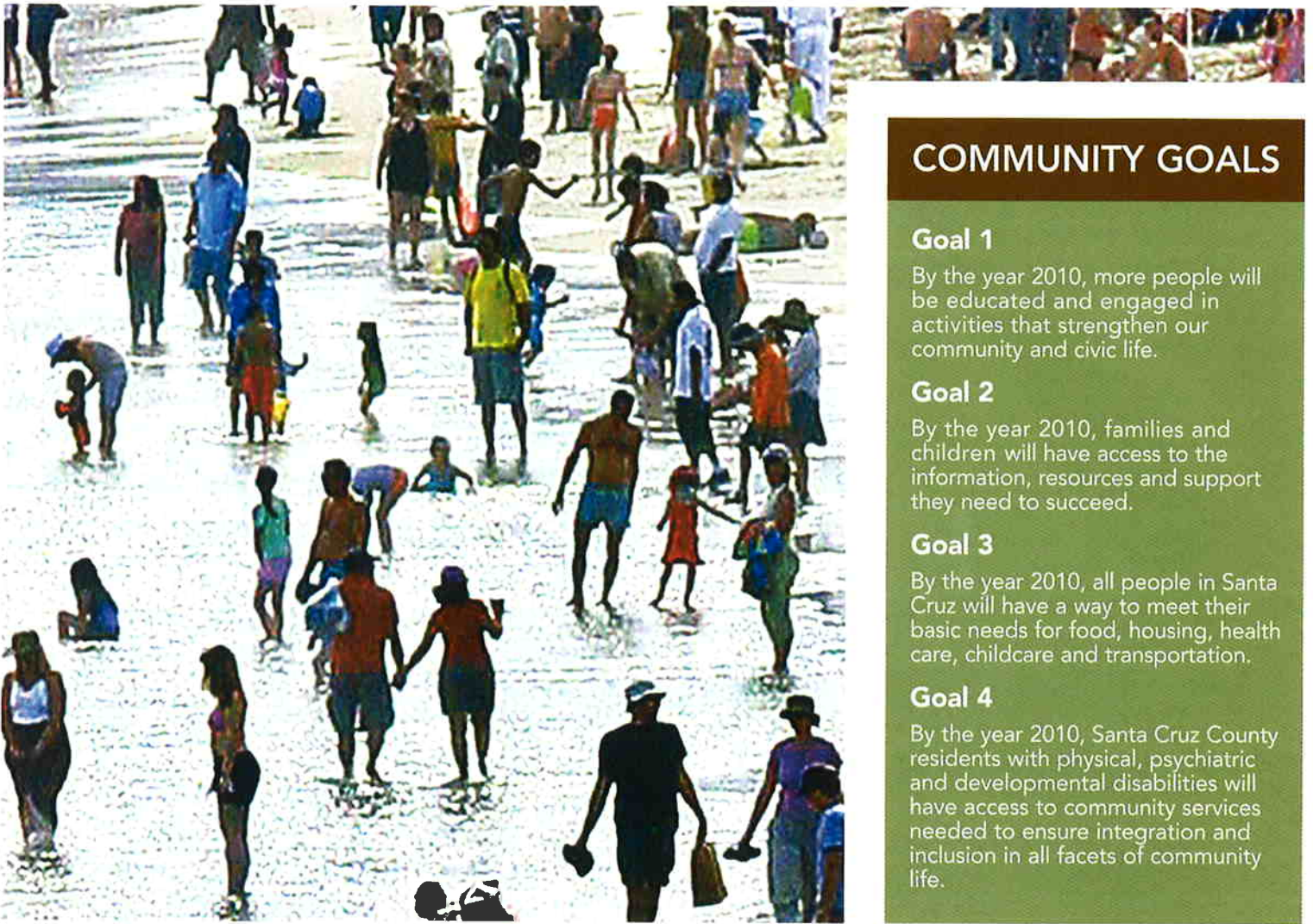
“Our kids have had a hard couple of years,” Ms. True said. “But we now have renewed attention on the issue, which is really important.”

Ms. Simonson called for an increase in funding for programs that support families in crisis.

“Direct service providers in our county are competing against each other for funds that are more limited,” she said. “I think we could improve outreach numbers if we could get some better funding.”

Overall, the CAP findings for 2005 raised more questions than provided answers, Ms. Simonson said.

“In terms of the CAP Public Safety goals, they’re good goals,” she said. “The problem is understanding the results. If people feel safer and crime is up in some areas and down in others, what are we as a community doing right to make people feel safer? Maybe it has nothing to do with the community at large. Maybe it’s our neighborhoods. If we could get the answers to that, that’s where we should be putting money.”



COMMUNITY GOALS

Goal 1

By the year 2010, more people will be educated and engaged in activities that strengthen our community and civic life.

Goal 2

By the year 2010, families and children will have access to the information, resources and support they need to succeed.

Goal 3

By the year 2010, all people in Santa Cruz will have a way to meet their basic needs for food, housing, health care, childcare and transportation.

Goal 4

By the year 2010, Santa Cruz County residents with physical, psychiatric and developmental disabilities will have access to community services needed to ensure integration and inclusion in all facets of community life.

Impoverished, Disabled Residents Still Need Help

Food Bank sees increase in use from 1997 to 2005

The community goals developed for the social environment of Santa Cruz County outline the hope for a peaceful, community-oriented, self-sufficient coastal society. Unfortunately, in such an economically and ethnically diverse county, that hope does not always automatically translate to the desired outcomes.

While county residents vote and give more of their time and money than ever before, there are still thousands of community members desperately trying to make ends meet while going without basic needs, such as health care, food, child care and housing. In 2005, 13.6 percent of residents found themselves having to go without basic needs, an increase from 9.7 percent in 1999.

When focusing on the Latino population, the numbers jumped to 23.2 percent last year. In 1999, just 13.5 percent of Latino families went without basic needs. Ten percent of Caucasians found themselves without basic needs in 2005, up from 8.7 percent in 1999.