A city is not gauged by its length and width, but by the breadthness of its vision and the height of its dreams. —Herb Caen

This year’s Community Assessment Project (CAP) Summary Report is all about vision. The 20/20 kind where we look back to see exactly where we have been, and the year 2020 kind where we dream big about where we’ll go next.

In the following pages you’ll hear from long-standing experts in our community, many of whom were here when our CAP, the second oldest assessment project in the country, was started. They take a look at the past 20 years, and share what they see as our successes and areas in need of continued improvement for the quality of our lives in Santa Cruz County. We’re proud of CAP’s community goal successes, like the Go for Health! Collaborative cross sector partnership, which has increased our children’s healthy eating and active living to reduce childhood obesity. The Community Prevention Partners collaboration has dropped the teen drug and alcohol use to below state averages, and the Healthy Kids coalition has worked to ensure that 90 percent of our county’s children have health insurance. The Community Prevention Partners collaboration has dropped the teen drug and alcohol use to below state averages, and the Healthy Kids coalition has worked to ensure that 90 percent of our county’s children have health insurance.

Side by side with our 20/20 experts are the voices of youth who point to what remains to be done. They challenge us to take control of our collective future and make it better. These young people are leading the way in youth city councils, clearing up beaches and engaging in the Youth Violence Prevention Task Force. Other collaborations of all ages are developing Smart Solutions to Homelessness and preparing students to be college-ready.

Looking backwards or forwards, Santa Cruz County is a community of big dreamers and true change makers. We hope you will enjoy this 20/20 retrospective and the energy of our youth looking forward to the world they want to live in in 2020. Be inspired! Follow up on our calls to action and be a part of making Santa Cruz County an even better place to live.
The county youth population of residents ages 10-17 is approximately 26,131. There have been wide variations in data measuring unemployment, job creation, local government tax revenue, and other indicators of economic well-being. Nevertheless, there have been consistent themes and new trends during these past two decades, some of which are hopeful and others, causes concern. The consistent theme of the Santa Cruz County economy has been the importance of the agricultural and tourism sectors. The agricultural sector has shown remarkable resilience and strength over the last two decades. The tourism industry, while showing more sensitivity to national economic trends, continues to be one of our most important industries and has roared back to life recently after the Great Recession of 2008.

Among the major causes for concern are the prevalence of low-wage jobs in our major industries and the high cost of living in our county, which contribute to large disparities in a number of indicators of economic well-being between the White and Latino populations. With the loss of manufacturing jobs over the last 20 years, our economy is increasingly divided between high-wage earners in the knowledge economy and low-wage earners in the service, retail, and agricultural industries.

Investment in the education and training of our workforce is the key to continued economic growth and to the reduction of disparities in our population. In addition, the high cost and unavailability of housing continues to be one of the most important challenges to economic growth and overall community well-being. In the future, integration into the Silicon Valley and wider Bay Area economy will help grow higher-wage technology jobs. Finally, protection of our agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive habitats will ensure that the agricultural and tourism industries remain the foundation of our local economy.

Crime rates have declined. High school graduation rates have increased. Community members feel better off financially compared to last year. As a county, we should be proud of this progress, and thank community leaders and ourselves for the efforts made to improve the quality of life in Santa Cruz County. In order to ensure that the community will continue to grow positively, we must advocate for positive youth development and guarantee equal access to resources for the youth population. We can accomplish this goal by ensuring overall safety, promoting pro-social activities, providing high levels of adult connection, creating a sense of community, and empowering youth. The county currently has a thriving foundation of support that is available to put these concepts into action. The county youth population of residents ages 10-17 is approximately 26,131. There are a variety of countywide programs and opportunities in which youth can participate. However, many need encouragement to become involved, whether that support comes from family or positive mentors. Youth need to understand that they can learn both in and outside the classroom, and feel confident that they can succeed beyond high school in whatever their passion may be. In fact, I would not be writing this article if it weren’t for all the mentors in my life. Pushing me out of my comfort zone and supporting my growth.

Santa Cruz County is a diverse community. We are surrounded by the beauty of lakes, mountains, and beaches. We should be able to enjoy them. The county’s future could be a positive or negative one, depending on the willingness of the entire community to unite and support our youth. With empowered youth given the right opportunities, the future of the county looks promising indeed.

Make a difference in students’ futures today: Volunteer your technological talents with Digital NEST, a new Technology Workforce Development Center for youth ages 12-24 located in Watsonville. jacob@digitalnest.org • digitalnest.org
The educational landscape in Santa Cruz County has undergone notable changes over the past two decades, driven by both local and state politics as well as changing demographics. The most significant demographic change is that of the increasing number of Latino youth being served in our county schools. Latino youth now comprise more than 55 percent of our countywide student population, up from 40 percent 20 years ago. This shifting enrollment demographic is also a statewide trend and has led to a major change in how schools are funded in California. Funding is now based on income and primary language, using a weighted formula. Recognizing that state school funding has been inadequate, especially during the 2008 recession, residents of Santa Cruz County have supported and passed both parcel taxes and bonds to help support our schools. In addition to the overhaul of school funding, we have also seen major changes in — and a strong reliance on — data assessment, and accountability to improve student achievement. These three metrics continue to inform the community of students’ progress. Enrollment has increased by six percent in the past decade, with Santa Cruz County now serving more than 40,000 students. Statewide assessment data for the county depicts a trend towards improved passing rates on the California High School Exit Exam. Increased access to college prep courses and SAT participation, a higher graduation rate (85 percent of all county students are receiving their high school diplomas), and overall progress on the California Standards Tests, which measure achievement on content standards in English-language arts, mathematics, science, and history-social science. 2014 also ushered in a new accountability model for all schools. Each school must now submit a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) annually to their county superintendent of schools for approval. This plan shall address the eight state priority areas: student engagement, school climate, course access, student achievement, parent involvement, basic services, content standards implementation, and other student outcomes. These significant changes in public education portend a bright future for all Santa Cruz County students.

In the face of standardized testing required by current college entrance procedures and our state education system, our schools are required to produce walking encyclopedias capable of reciting theorems and facts on demand. The fact that many students still use flashcards to prepare for exams shows that school in its current state is in large part a memory game. But beware: encyclopedias are sedentary creatures that do not innovate, discover, question, or invent. Our county’s education system should be geared toward achieving what these encyclopedias cannot. But inefficient standardized tests are not the main issue impeding the success of our county’s education system. The way we prepare our children for these tests is the root of the problem. Our schools have been focusing on the “what-to-think” part of education, and overlooking the critical “how-to-think” aspect. Our priority should be to build a community where analytical thinking and scientific literacy is commonplace. In math and the sciences, it is much more beneficial for a student to be capable of determining whether something is true, than to simply remember and accept that it is. Instead of handing out theorem after theorem, teachers should present a general problem and guide students via experiment and discussion to rediscover the known answer. This style of teaching is what produces students with a genuine passion to question, learn, and discover. Time will tell if the new Common Core State Standards will be an improvement on the standardized tests of the past.

Education is the foundation of society and the driving force of our economy, and the quality of the education we provide for our children tells us much about what awaits us in the future. In order for Santa Cruz County to raise generations of socially productive citizens, curious scientists, innovative engineers, and socially and environmentally responsible politicians, we must first rethink how to teach our children — the rest will follow naturally.

Help the young people in your life succeed in school and access enriching activities by using the new Student Support Services Resource Directory website: sccstudentresources.org.
Santa Cruz County has always been a healthy place to live. With so many options for recreation, wellness, and farm fresh nutrition, it's hard to avoid a healthy lifestyle.

In the past 20 years, the county has seen many health-related changes, not just to the health care delivery system, but also the addition and growth of so many community programs dedicated to health. Looking at the Community Assessment Project data for this year, a few important trends reflect these changes.

Overall, more than 80 percent of CAP survey respondents describe their physical health as good, very good, or excellent – a testament to the wealth of options available locally for recreation, wellness, and health care. The percentage of people in Santa Cruz County with any kind of health insurance is nearly 94 percent. Another positive sign? On a positive note, alcohol use is down overall, even though the availability of alcohol has increased through more retail outlets. Among 11th graders in particular, alcohol use has decreased more than 10 percent since 2000-2001. Tobacco use is down among students, too. This is a good sign that Santa Cruz County residents are getting educated about how to stay healthy.

In the future, I hope for a flourishing health sector that will allow anyone, no matter their socioeconomic status or background, to be allowed access to health care. No one person should be denied health care even if they cannot afford it or are ineligible for low income health insurance. Everyone deserves good health and everyone deserves to be treated when they are sick.

In addition, I hope for more specialized care for the many homeless people living on the streets of Santa Cruz County. Currently, there are services that provide some medical care at certain health clinics to patients who are homeless. However, I envision comprehensive health care options, such as clinics that provide regular psychiatric and counseling treatments for those who are suicidal, mentally ill, or addicted to drugs. These wrap-around clinics could help specific people experiencing homelessness increase their self-sufficiency and ultimately reduce the number of homeless people in the community.

Looking forward, I would like to see a comprehensive health sector in Santa Cruz County where no one is left out, and where we understand that healthy residents create a healthy community.

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The CAP’s analysis that year found that residents successfully reduced water use, which serves us well in the face of today’s drought. The health of six of the county’s 11 major waterways improved, and between 2000 and 2005, 6,000 acres were added to permanent open space, bringing protected acreage to 27 percent of the county’s land. Agricultural acreage declined, however, roadway congestion had increased and the use of alternative transportation decreased.

In 2013, water pollution, litter, and water availability were the top community concerns about the natural environment.

We’re fiercely protective of our ocean, climate, and land, which is why the Community Assessment Project (CAP) began measuring the state of our natural environment – and our attitudes toward it – in 1999.

The 2005 CAP report states: “When asked what one thing concerned surveyed residents the most about the natural environment, people have consistently cited overall pollution, air pollution, water pollution, overpopulation, and development of open space and agricultural land as top concerns.”

As a surfer who comes from the mountains, I am able to appreciate every aspect of Santa Cruz County’s incredible environment daily. Because of my proximity to nature, I have developed a deep connection with the world around me and a passion for protecting it.

As a surfer, I am very affected by the health of the ocean. The striking beauty of the Pacific Ocean is something that has always drawn people to California, but when trash is strewn across the beach and occasionally floating in the water it detracts from the beauty and health of the ocean. When I find jellyfish-like pieces of plastic floating in the water, it tugs at my soul to think of the fish that could have mistaken it for something good to eat. And it alarms me to think how long it could remain in the ocean if I don’t put it in my wetsuit and take it to a trashcan on shore.

I think that cleanliness of the ocean needs to be a far bigger priority. Cowell’s Beach, with its abundant amounts of trash and needles collected by cleanup groups as well as the unhealthy levels of toxicity in the water, is a perfect example of a California beach ravaged by those who use it.

I hope that our community can become more involved in keeping our beloved Pacific trash free. They can do so by participating in beach cleanup events with organizations such as Save Our Shores and Surfrider Foundation, and by picking up their trash when they leave a beach. However, picking up the trash once it reaches the shore is only one part of the solution. There also needs to be more community involvement in keeping the rivers and streets trash free, as the water that flows through them will eventually meet the ocean. In 2020, I hope to be living in a county where far more members of the community have become aware of and passionate about keeping our oceans and rivers trash free.

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There are monthly opportunities to clean up our beaches and rivers. Bring your family or coworkers to clean up your favorite beach, or discover new wonderful waterfronts in our county!

 Organizations in town that lead cleanups include:
- Save Our Shores 831.462.5660 - saveourshores.org/volunteer
- Surfrider Foundation 831.476.7667 - santacruz.surfrider.org
- Save the Waves savethewaves.org
- Valley Women’s Club valleywomensclub.org

**SURVEY: ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

What one thing concerns you the most about the natural environment in Santa Cruz County?

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Water Pollution</th>
<th>Traffic</th>
<th>Air Pollution</th>
<th>Water Pollution</th>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>22.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2013: 1177 respondents offering 1762 responses. Source: Applied Survey Research. 2003-2013 Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project. Telephone survey. Note: This was an open-ended survey and in which allows the respondent to provide any answer. Due to variance in coding, data should be compared by top responses rather than tracking individual responses over time.
In 2013, Sergeant Loran Baker and Detective Elizabeth Butler of the Santa Cruz Police Department tragically lost their lives in the line of duty. This horrible loss broke the hearts of the entire county. The feelings this event evoked, as well as other tragic incidents of violence, left us wondering if we were indeed secure and safe. As shocking as these incidents are, they do not paint a full picture of public safety in Santa Cruz County. Sheriff-elect Jim Hart notes that homicide rates have, in fact, declined, and that the crime rate among adults has dropped significantly over the past 20 years. However, Santa Cruz County’s average homicide rate is still higher than the State of California’s, leaving work for us to do. Hart indicates that public nuisance and quality of life offenses still cause citizens a great deal of concern, affecting their neighborhoods and perception of safety.

Fernando Giraldo, Chief Probation Officer, points to the declining youth crime rate as a positive achievement. However, youth violence continues to be a valid community concern and a coalition of stakeholders have formed the Criminal Justice Council/Youth Violence Prevention Task Force to address this countywide issue. The task force utilizes a data-driven and evidence-based methodology to promote safe neighborhoods, and focus resources on the goal of fostering successful transitions to adulthood for young people. The Task Force is a vibrant example of the CAP methodology of community mobilization as a way to achieve results.

Judy Yokel, director of Family and Children’s Services Department, notes the incidence of substantiated child abuse is declining significantly over the past 20 years. However, rates locally are still higher than California rates. The County has concentrated efforts on targeting prevention services toward higher risk families, and this strategy has yielded results. Parental substance abuse remains the single highest factor underlying child neglect. We have achieved a great deal over the past two decades; our results are remarkable. Despite heartbreaking public tragedies of violence and loss, our community has demonstrated that it knows how to remain on course and work together to achieve results.
The overall well-being of county residents and their engagement in the community has been tracked for two decades through various quality of life indicators in the Community Assessment Project (CAP) report. These indicators include basic needs, housing, community involvement, voting, the incidence of racism, services for individuals with disabilities, and after-school activities. Representatives from various sectors of the county, all working toward improving the quality of life for residents, agree that a sustainable community is one that provides opportunities for everyone to participate and prosper.

On the upswing, the CAP survey indicates that overall, 67 percent of residents surveyed report that they are “very satisfied” with their quality of life. Over the past two decades, we have seen that residents have volunteered at higher rates, with a 9 percent increase since 2003. There continues to be a strong commitment among residents to get involved in their community.

As we take a closer look, we find that the quality of life has not progressed for individuals and families that are unemployed and/or earning lower incomes over the past two decades. The 2013 Point-In-Time Homeless Census and Survey reveals that 3,536 individuals reported they were homeless. Of these, 544 were families with children, which is an increase of more than 42 percent from 2007. Indicators show that there is a growing number of families and Latinos that are struggling economically.

In planning for the future, key questions can guide our efforts to address the disparities in the quality of life experienced by some Santa Cruz County residents, particularly for Latinos. Such questions could include: What new partnerships can be formed between businesses and the agricultural industry to improve the economic well-being of families? How can we better support residents facing economic and social barriers to more engaged in local government, voting, and helping shape policies?

Youth are a great community resource to affect positive change. We should continue to engage them meaningfully, and provide them the support and resources to effectively partner with adults.

Simply put, as a community we need to build inclusive environments where we treat all our youth – as well as adults – as we would want to be treated. This means planning and creating policies that are socially, culturally, and economically just. In a thriving Santa Cruz County, jobs will pay living wages. Families and individuals can afford adequate housing. Schools are sufficiently funded and staffed to support students of all learning and physical abilities, sexual and gender identities, and ethnic and language origins.

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Shana Ordinario of STRANGE discusses the importance of creating all-inclusive environments for youths and adults with Ana Espinoza, Watsonville Parks and Community Services Director.
community heroes

LEFT TO RIGHT, 1ST ROW (BOTTOM): Charles Kieffer, Clotilde Sanchez, Nereida Robles, Kate Hinnenkamp, Mary Masters, Rosalba Contreras

2ND ROW: Alan Schlenger, Lawrence P. Drury, Laura Marcus, Guillermina Porraz, Peter Connery

3RD ROW: John Frigon, Silvia Austerlic, Gary McNeil, Maggie McKay, Brent Haddad

NOT PICTURED: Carol Polhamus, Fe Silva, Maria Virgen