

## Pouring on the charm: San Anselmo celebrates recovery from flood at festival

Rob Rogers

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For the merchants of downtown San Anselmo, this weekend's 23rd annual Art and Design Festival was a welcome-back party.

"I opened my store a month ago, and it's been great," said Marnie Delaney, owner of Doodlebug, a San Anselmo Avenue toy store. "Everyone has been so supportive. They have been, since the flood. I still don't know the names of everyone who helped out when I had 41½ feet of mud in my store."

San Anselmo's Chamber of Commerce hoped to draw about 30,000 to the downtown festival this weekend. Some of those who wandered between tented booths, open-air stages and the street's own shops came to support a town ravaged by the December 2005 floods, said Jean Stewart, former owner of Shadows, a dress and jewelry store.

"This is a San Anselmo festival, and I think a lot of local people came to spend their money locally," said Stewart, who operated the store for 39 years before turning it over to her daughter this year.

Others came to enjoy the food, wine, music and games. One popular game, developed by San Anselmo parent Bob Gori, sent children on a treasure hunt to find architectural details throughout the downtown area. Those who completed the search were eligible to win gift certificates.

That the hunt led parents from one merchant's store to another was no accident, said chamber President Connie Rodgers.

"We wanted to bring business to the center," Rodgers said. "We saw this festival as a way to reinforce the merchants downtown. Placing the booths in the middle of the street almost forces people to the sidewalks, and the festival itself creates a reason for people to come to San Anselmo."

A more unusual game asked children to guess how much pocket change was hidden in a bucket of muddy water.

The game was sponsored by the Flood Mitigation League of Ross Valley. In addition to hosting games - the group also asked adults to guess the weight of a sandbag - the league collected donations and memberships during the festival. Members hope to use the money to perform a more complete hydrological study of the Ross Valley flood plain.

"We're hoping to hire some high schoolkids and to train other volunteers and staff to work on the project," member Lise Stampfli Torme said. "We need something that goes beyond what FEMA has."

Some merchants praised the people of San Anselmo for supporting them with their money, business and volunteer labor following the flood.

"I had a fire two years ago, so this is the second time I had to close the store," said Delaney, who estimates that she lost \$100,000 in the flood, beyond what was covered by insurance.

"I feel like I've asked people to put up with a lot, being closed for five months," she said. "But I still feel lucky, listening to the news and hearing what's going on in the world these days."

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Marifran Carlson, a Chicago resident visiting relatives in Marin County who celebrated her birthday at the festival, had one word to describe San Anselmo:

"It's charming," she said. "I came up to say hi to my family, and I'm having a very pleasant time."

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### IF YOU GO

The 23rd annual Art and Design Festival continues from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. today on San Anselmo Avenue.

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