

Rants & Raves

It's early in the year, but already there's so much to rave about and — could it be a trend? — so little to rant about:

Rave: The Pentagon upped the budget at the Defense Language Institute by a whopping \$362 million over the next five years, which will enable the Monterey school to reduce class sizes and expand courses from 63 weeks to 77 weeks. That's good news for the war effort as well as local landlords, barbers and others catering to all those shiny-faced students. At least some of the credit goes to Sam Farr.

Rave: Grand jury reports tend to be dry recitations of bureaucratic boo-boos. Last week's annual report by Monterey County's grand jury was a splendid read, however, and contained an unusual amount of good news. The long section on problems within the county planning department was well-argued, and it was nice to see the kind words for the Head Start and Migrant Education programs.

Rave: Mary Lou Stutzman saw what needed to be done decades before most others. She fought for affordable farmworker housing, taught English as a second language, worked to broaden voting rights and filled many other public service roles while raising a family on the Peninsula. She was named one of the county's outstanding women in 2003, an honor she deserved years before. She died a week ago at age 80, leaving behind countless admirers.

Rave: Operation Christmas Cheer, the annual fundraising drive sponsored by The Herald, First National Bank of Central California and the Salvation Army, once again topped the \$100,000 mark, putting the 20-year total close to \$2 million. Thanks goes to the many contributors large and small, the volunteers at the bank, and the Salvation Army employees and volunteers who help distribute the proceeds to the needy.

Rave: Developers of a 154-unit project planned for south Boronda near Salinas are promising that 40 percent of the homes will go for below-market prices. Builders seem to be getting the message that if they want to build around here, they have to provide a serious amount of affordable housing, not just a token.

Rave: The Salinas Planning Commission said yes to allowing the Dorothy's Place women's shelter to keep sheltering at least through the winter.

Rave: First Night Monterey went off without a hitch, wet, windy weather notwithstanding. Business was slower than usual, so buy your tickets early to make sure the event continues.

Rave: Who said Carmel is a sleepy little town? Acts booked into the Sunset Center next month include Eric Burdon and Little Feat. They may appeal only to aging boomers but they can crank.

Rant: Against department policy, a Soledad police officer took two automatic rifles home and, guess what? Burglars got them. The theft took place more than a year ago but wasn't publicized until recently. The officer has since left the department. The guns remain on the loose. Some rules aren't meant to be broken.