

# North county's diversity rich

*Wetlands, artichokes, fishing, ocean research, electricity are among its many assets*

Staff report

North Monterey County encompasses a canyon community mysteriously named after prunes, the self-proclaimed "artichoke center of the world," the harbor home to California's largest power plant and one of the region's poorest areas.

Other hamlets such as Elkhorn, Las Lomas and Aromas are sprinkled between Salinas and the Santa Cruz County line.

But four unincorporated communities come first to mind in north county: Castroville, Moss Landing, Prunedale and Pajaro.

Here's a look at them:

■ **Castroville:** At the crossroads of three major highways — Highways 1, 156 and 183 — Castroville is the second-oldest community in Monterey County.

Founded in 1863, the community of about 7,000 is surrounded by fields of artichokes, a delicacy introduced by Swiss-Italian growers in the 1920s.

Castroville, which expects to open a new library, plaza and community center in September, describes itself as the world's artichoke center with a sign across Merritt Street.

■ **Prunedale:** Prunedale is a moving target. Depending on whom you ask, it covers anywhere from three to 38 square miles.

The same uncertainty is encountered when delving into why the community — a series of oak-lined canyons with a wide range of old and new homes — was named after prunes in the first place.

Sporting two shopping centers and bisected by Highway 101, Prunedale has attracted residents seeking country living near Salinas, to the south, and Silicon Valley, to the north. It has a population of about 17,000 residents.

■ **Moss Landing:** The "quaint fishing village" of Moss Landing and its harbor is home, obviously, to fishing boats.

But the harbor community of 300 residents, tucked between Monterey Bay and Highway 1, also has the state's largest dairy plant, one of the county's last dairy farms and a hive of antique stores.

It also is a marine studies area, home to the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories and the Monterey Bay



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A surfer bails in front of a breaking wave at Moss Landing State Beach in December. North Monterey County has abundant recreation opportunities, including fishing, beachcombing and wildlife watching.

Aquarium Research Institute.

Moss Landing also serves as the gateway to Elkhorn Slough, a national estuarine reserve and magnet for kayakers and wildlife lovers.

■ **Pajaro:** Located south of the Pajaro River next to Watsonville, Pajaro often has been the forgotten stepchild of Monterey County.

Pajaro's mostly Latino population of 3,400 lives in some of the county's most crowded homes, amid a hodgepodge of food-processing plants, auto shops, small stores and bars.

Community leaders are hoping to bring a shopping center to Pajaro, but county officials want to see river levees strengthened before allowing significant development.

In the past 11 years, the little town has twice been hit by devastating floods.



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Castroville Plaza takes shape in Castroville in November.