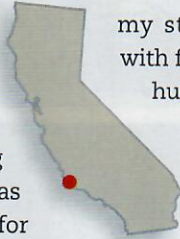


Laid-Back Lompoc

Flower fields, murals, and vineyards along the Central Coast

BY MATT JAFFE

In a windswept farming valley bordered by rolling coastal hills, Lompoc (pronounced LOM-poke) lies about 20 miles west of US Highway 101. For a few years during the 1980s, this town of about 44,000 was the center of my universe. I worked for the *Lompoc Record*, the local newspaper (remember those?), covering everything from aerospace at Vandenberg Air Force Base to agriculture. I came to love many things about Lompoc. The Italian stone pines that formed a stately canopy over



my street. The miles of cropland, with fields brightened by the brilliant hues of sweet peas, marigolds, and larkspurs. Now, with the nearby Santa Rita Hills ranked in the top echelon of California grape-growing regions, this onetime temperance colony has emerged as a destination for wine lovers, yet remains an affordable getaway. Intrigued by Lompoc's evolution, I returned to revisit old haunts and discover what's new around town.

Art History

Nearly **40 murals**, most of them in the reviving Old Town, portray the area's history, from its Chumash Indian heritage to rocket launches at Vandenberg Air Force Base. The **Lompoc Museum**, with an extensive Chumash artifact collection, is housed in a 1911 Carnegie Library building. Suggested donation \$1. Lompoc Mural Society: (805) 733-4282; lompocmurals.com. Lompoc Museum: 200 S. H Street. (805) 736-3888; lompocmuseum.org.

COURTESY EXPLORE LOMPOC (3)

[in flower]

Once known as "the flower seed capital of the world," the Lompoc Valley produced 70 percent of the world's flower seeds in 1964. Production declined in the 1980s, but the legacy lives on in the town's annual **Flower Festival**. The parade features floats decorated entirely with blossoms and natural materials; and food booths serve tri-tip sandwiches and the Lompoc Filipino American Club's *lumpia* (egg rolls), which were popular long before I arrived in town. June 21–25. (805) 735-8511; lompocvalleyfestivals.com/flower-festival.

