

Smithsonian.com – Your Kind of Town

Petaluma, Calif.

Krista O'Connor, June 27, 2010



Petaluma is unique in its location, history and population. Founded in 1858, and only about 50 miles from San Francisco, it still retains a small town feeling and culture. Many of the residents' families go back generations, and it's the kind of town in which our children grow up together. There is a friendly cross-town rivalry between the westside Petaluma High and the eastside Casa Grande High, and each has its own claims to fame in programs and accomplishments. Petaluma is also connected to San Francisco via the River and the Bay, which provided early transportation and allowed this "chicken town" to supply the area with eggs and other agricultural products. General Mariano Vallejo lived and worked here at the adobe ranch, built in 1836, that still sits on a low hill overlooking much of the land once owned by this famous Mexican American. This is a friendly town, and people are involved in both commerce and politics in a way that makes for a strong local community. Many people choose to do most of their spending right here in town, even though we don't have access to many of the "big box" stores. We support our local merchants who in turn provide us with many festivals and events to attend annually. The Butter and Eggs Day Parade every April is one example of how this community comes together to celebrate its unique character. Over a dozen well-known films, including American Graffiti, have been filmed here, and an annual car show and cruising night has also become part of our local festivities. The culture and community that we share makes us strong, and with our diverse mixture of old and new, this is a wonderful and comfortable place to be.