

**The magic bus:** Thirty years ago the Summer of Love transported society to a new place. Left: Ken Kesey's 1939 International Harvester bus became an icon for the journey of the Merry Pranksters and the trips many others took. Top right: poets Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, Freewheelin' Frank, and Maretta addressed a crowd in Golden Gate Park. Bottom right: Sam, a Haight Street celebrant. Bottom center: Spectators with love beads and flowers were plentiful at a Digger street happening.

# Love fest

Thirty years ago, the Summer of Love transformed San Francisco — and the world. **By Ron Curran**

*The big battles that we won cannot be reversed. We were young, self-righteous, reckless, hypocritical, brave, silly, headstrong, and scared half to death. And we were right.*

Abbie Hoffman

**C**HET HELMS might as well have been the mayor of Haight-Ashbury during the Haight Street Fair two Sundays ago.

As we meandered through the tie-dye and tattoo booths talking about the Summer of Love and the 30th anniversary celebration he's helping to stage, the founder of Family Dog Productions was greeted both by old friends from 1967 and by teens looking to vicariously enjoy those days of hippie abandon.

Equal parts freaky intellectual and grizzled sage in a goldenrod sport jacket and wild gray beard, Helms was gracious to all as he reminisced about the days when San Francisco was ground zero in the hippie revolution and reflected on the lasting legacy of that storied era.

"This is definitely preaching to the choir here in the Haight," he joked, settling in at a table at the Red Vic Bed and Breakfast, peace-sign paintings hanging behind him. "But the response to Summer of Love '97

has been excellent from all over the world."

It has been a long, strange trip for Helms, from the moment he left the University of Texas in 1962 and hitchhiked to San Francisco with the then-undiscovered Janis Joplin, to the planning for this year's Oct. 12 Summer of Love festival dedicated, according to the organizers' mission statement, to "creating a unique multicultural, intergenerational gathering for the purpose of instilling reverence for global peace, embracing freedom, en-

couraging compassion, and celebrating diversity, in an environment blending music, dance, multimedia imagery, and spiritual elements." Several prominent bands have been booked to play the party, to be held at Golden Gate Park's soccer field, near the Beach Chalet, at the park's northwest corner. Festival attendees will be asked for contributions to defer costs, but no one will be turned away.

## Old is new

The timing is propitious. What's old seems to be new again, as many icons of the late '60s and early '70s have been in the news lately.

Former Black Panther Geronimo Pratt was just released from prison on bail, awaiting his appeal of a murder conviction that his attorney and supporters claim was a government frame-up. Martin Luther King's family is helping his alleged assassin, James Earl Ray, get a new trial. It seems like every month we read more proof that Vietnam War critics were right about the wrongness of the war. Bob Dylan was recently hospitalized with a heart infection. Linda McCartney has offered to contribute some photographs she took in '67 to an auction for the cause.

Helms and other members of the Council for the Summer of Love, which is organizing the festival, hope that this year's celebration can help inspire the same social awareness that 1967's movement did.

"I think that many people, myself included, are shocked by what we've seen happening in this country over the past 15 years, the way the rich and the politicians, the whole Newt Gingrich crowd, treat people as throwaway items — throwaway children, throwaway homeless, throwaway immigrants," said Helms, 54, adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles. "In California we've built 27 prisons in the time we built one school of higher learning, locking up kids who know the difference between smoking an occasional joint and doing heroin and putting them in 'crime school' instead. I've believed since the Summer of Love that it's the personal transformations that count, and the more people we can get to participate in this Summer of Love, the more we can manifest the

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## Summer sponsors

The Council for the Summer of Love 30th anniversary celebration is sponsored by the following organizations:

Action Coalition for Global Change  
The Children's Council  
Gilde Foundation  
Haight-Ashbury Merchants Association  
Haight-Ashbury Street Fair  
International Indian Treaty Council  
MECA  
Music Time School  
San Francisco Bay Guardian (media sponsor)  
San Francisco Interfaith Chapel at the Presidio  
San Francisco Women's Building  
United Farm Workers  
Verbum Inc. and the Digital Be-In

# SUMMER OF LOVE

## LOVE FEST from page 18

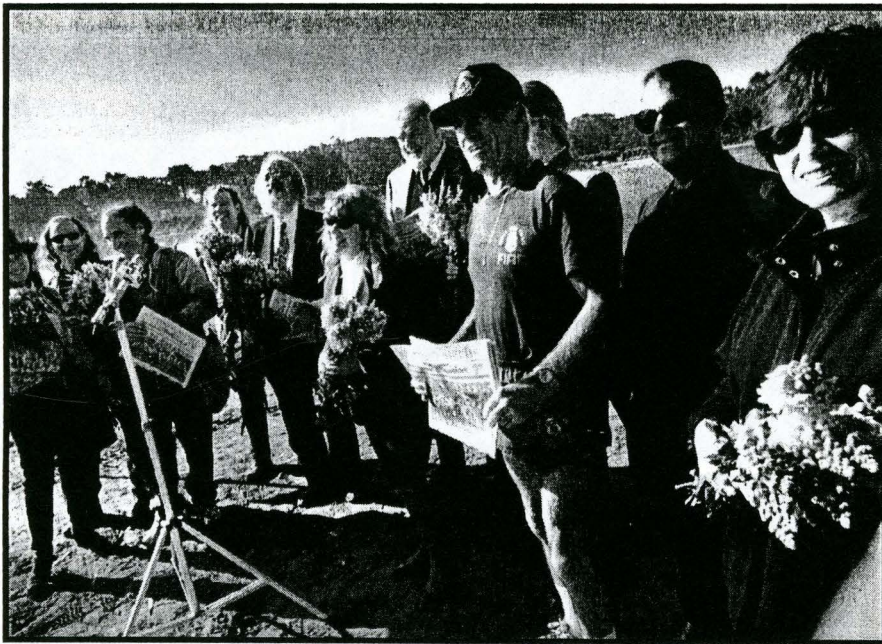
broad cultural changes we need. In the same way our parental generation was shaped by the depression, we were shaped by 1967. Now maybe people's core values will be shaped for the better by this year's Summer of Love."

Of course, revisiting the Summer of Love has meant revisiting the clashes between political idealism and infighting, altruism and commercialism, that made the hippie era so refreshing and frustrating the first time around. Earlier in the planning stages, industry behemoth Bill Graham Presents service-marked the phrase "Summer of Love" and tried to stare down its old rival, Helms's Family Dog Productions, before agreeing to let the Summer of Love be the Summer of Love. And the city refused to let the festival use Golden Gate Park's Polo Field without paying an insurance retainer much higher than the Recreation and Park Department charges other events, before the compromise on the soccer fields was worked out.

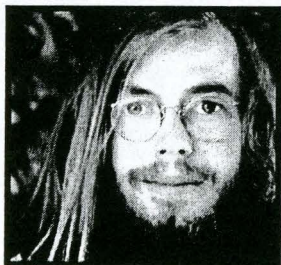
Organizers have had to relive the casualties and hypocrisy that were part of the '67 scene. There was drug and booze abuse by people who couldn't handle it then—and who, three decades later, still wish they hadn't tried. (Helms, who introduced Joplin to Big Brother and the Holding Company, once sent the singer back to her family in Texas to clean up before she returned to substance abuse and eventually died of it.)

The movement attracted a lot of trust-fund hippie kids who were more interested in partying, getting laid, and making the obligatory trip to the Haight Street Free Clinic than in politics. White males ran most things, often ignoring civil rights and the women's movement while preaching equality and egalitarianism.

But festival organizers say the run-up to the Summer of Love festival has been overwhelmingly positive, reuniting many friends from the



**Keep on keepin' on:** Summer of Love '97 organizers Camille Houston, Allen Weiss, Allen Cohen, Billy McCarthy, Chet Helms, Lois Wise, Bruce B. Brugmann, Ron Turner, Robert Manning, Doug Dunlop, and Jean Dibble (from left) protested Recreation and Parks officials' refusal to allow the Summer of Love festival to be held at the Polo Field. A compromise was worked out, allowing the Oct. 12 festival to be held at the soccer field at the west end of Golden Gate Park, near the Beach Chalet.



**Hair of the dog:** The Family Dog's Chet Helms, circa 1967.

old days—despite the fact that some have taken very divergent career and political paths.

Council members include public-relations dynamo Lee Houskeeper, who has represented many of the political elite since his early days as a 20-year-old agent for Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, and the Doors. Meanwhile, Helms's former roommate Terence Hallinan is now district attorney, and was a big supporter of the festival in its Polo Field battle with the city. Other personalities from the time are serving alongside Helms on the council: Ron Turner founded Last Gasp, a successful publisher and distributor of underground comics. Allen Whitman is a member of the band the Mermen. Eric Christensen is a producer at KGO, channel 7. Judith Davis is part of the Rainbow Grocery cooperative. Michael Dingle is assistant to the director of the SOMAR Gallery.

What they share is a belief that the original Summer of Love changed the world.

Their plans for the '97 festival are a bit more modest. "I usually abhor planning things by committee—a giraffe is a horse planned by committee," Houskeeper says. "But I've enjoyed

working with the council because there's true validity in the commitment and diversification. I also think it's important that we get the real message out, because to a large degree in 1967 we put on the media people who were only interested in sex, drugs, and rock and roll. We sensationalized things, joking around, and the message got lost. One of our goals this time is to make sure the values get out, and we're getting a great response from a lot of people who weren't even born yet in 1967."

### 'Generally degenerate'

San Francisco's establishment was anything but supportive three decades ago.

"The 'hippies' and 'yippies' invading our great city bring with them illicit drug use, out-of-wedlock conjugal activities, and generally degenerate behavior of various types," pontificated the *San Francisco Chronicle* in a 1967 editorial. "We demand that the San Francisco Police Department and City Hall take all steps possible to stop this growing in-

flux before it is too late to save our law-abiding citizens and our impressionable youth."

The cops responded to establishment protests in full force, harassing and busting thousands of kids for everything from possession of a dime bag to the all-encompassing "vagranacy."

Bill McCarthy, who has been working with Helms to produce the festival, says things have changed. "We even got a call from the chamber of commerce asking how they could work with us to attract tourists," he says. "Thirty years ago the establishment tried to run us out of town. Now they're asking us to bring more people into town. That's fine with me, because we were good for San Francisco in '67 and we'll be good for San Francisco in '97."

Helms says the accomplishments of the Summer of Love generation are profoundly significant but sometimes subtle.

"We've taken a lot of heat the past few years, especially from the right wing," he says. "We've been hung with all of our baggage, and there were mistakes we made, experiments that didn't work. But we're never credited with the good stuff—getting organic food in the stores, the Board of Supervisors including anti-nuclear power pamphlets with voter registration forms, environmental awareness, medical marijuana... and we stopped that damn war. Though many hippies carried the traditional gender roles, that was the cauldron from which the women's movement and gay and lesbian movements emerged. People take them for granted and forget how hard we had to work," he says. Helms remains proud of the accomplishments that creative ferment generated. "I'll use a couple of ten-dollar words," he said. "Our accomplishments are so ubiquitous that they're anonymous." ■

## Join the fun!

If you want to participate in the Summer of Love 30th anniversary, you can:

- Attend the long series of events (see page 25) all summer.
- Volunteer to help out or donate money, services, or memorabilia (call 415-487-4628).
- Enter the *Bay Guardian's* Summer of Love Poster Contest (see page 45 to enter).
- Send us your personal recollections from 1967. We'll publish them on our Web page ([www.sfbg.com](http://www.sfbg.com)) and put some selections in a future issue. Send to Summer of Love Desk, *Bay Guardian*, 520 Hampshire, S.F., CA 94110.
- Check out our Summer of Love conference on the *Guardian* Online BBS (see page 5 to log in).
- Check out the Summer of Love Web site at [www.summeroflove.org](http://www.summeroflove.org).

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

THIS IS TRUE: IN HURST, TEXAS, A JUDGE HAS RULED THAT THE CITY MAY USE ITS POWER OF EMINENT DOMAIN TO CONDEMN PRIVATE HOMES--TO MAKE WAY FOR A SHOPPING MALL...



AND HECK--MAYBE THE CITY COUNCIL COULD PASS A FEW NEW LAWS TO HELP THE MALL OUT... ALL FOR THE GREATER GOOD, OF COURSE...



THE MALL'S DEVELOPERS ARE OBVIOUSLY WELL CONNECTED--SO PERHAPS THE TOWN FATHERS WILL CONTINUE TO INTERVENE ON THEIR BEHALF AFTER THE MALL IS COMPLETED... FOR INSTANCE, A LITTLE HELP FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD COULD GO A LONG WAY...



SURE, THERE MAY BE SOME DISSENT AT FIRST-- BUT NO NEED TO WORRY! AFTER ALL, THE HURST JUDICIARY HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THAT IT KNOWS HOW TO DEAL WITH TROUBLEMAKERS...

