

# After 32 years, First Night Monterey keeps coming up with fresh ideas to celebrate New Year's.

Sara Rubin 8 hrs ago 0



Above: Paulette Lynch and Ken Peterson fell in love on a New Year's Day 40 years ago, and started First Night Monterey 32 years ago. It's since become tradition, bringing performance and art to downtown every Dec. 31. Below: an example of an interactive art installation for this year's First Night.

Daniel Dreifuss

Listen to this article now  
 Powered by Trinity Audio  
 00:00 05:53

**PAULETTE LYNCH HAS BEEN TO HER SHARE OF CLASSIC NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTIES.** You know the type: stiff cocktails, Champagne at midnight. While the party itself lasts well into the next day – and, in this case, the next year – the year generally does not start on a note of feeling fresh.

What a weird tradition, when you think about it – begin a new year bleary eyed, instead of feeling good and ready for what's ahead. The concept to do it in a wholly different way, a tradition known as First Night, has its roots in Boston in 1975 (to kick off 1976). In the years that followed, dozens of cities began hosting similar events, including Monterey, thanks to Lynch. She traveled often to the northeast to visit family and came across the bonafide celebration – with live music, art, community – in an all-ages, alcohol-free context that would leave attendees feeling ready to face a year ahead, instead of drowning out the year gone by.

"It tends to be a celebration where people might lose themselves in a drunken stupor, and not be going clear-eyed into the future," says Ken Peterson, Lynch's husband and cofounder of First Night Monterey, which they started in 1992 and is entering its 32nd celebration this New Year's Eve.

Here's how good it can get if you have the wherewithal to pay attention on New Year's Day. Lynch and Peterson knew each other through mutual friends when they found themselves at a New Year's Eve dinner in the San Francisco area, and crashing with a bunch of friends at a motel. The next day, Jan. 1, the two went for a hike in the Marin Headlands, near the Golden Gate Bridge. It was the beginning of their romance 40 years ago.

"We realized there was something special sparking," Peterson says. "It was a moment of clarity and sunshine – and a brand new year."

**CENTRAL TO THE NOTION OF CELEBRATING THE NEW YEAR** at First Night is looking forward. It's less contemplative than it is festive, but some of the interactive art pieces demand a bit of introspection. First Night Monterey's executive director, Ellen Martin, is feeling the anxiety of these divisive political times.

"Next year can be a really great year – it depends how we look at it," Martin says. "That's really what First Night is all about."

To that end, interactive art pieces include some processing. One features wheels with different phrases, prompting participants to roll them to different words capturing some different composite sentences about hopefulness for the year ahead: "Love is leading the way to 2025," or "It's going to be a great year."

There's also a piece with three panels that invite participants to choose color-coded sticky notes that capture how they're feeling, with an acknowledgment that not everything is hunky dory. Under the three headers – "I am feeling," "I am hoping," and "My resolution for the New Year is" – people can each write a message. They will also select a color for their note based on whether they are joyful, sad, anxious, etc. The idea is not only to give people a public diary platform of sorts, but also to create a piece that reflects in color where the community vibe is overall – happy, sad, or somewhere in between.

All that said, there is no requirement to get introspective. There's also simple fun and community. One interactive art installation is a paint-by-numbers style mural with chalk paint, so everyone can contribute a small square to something bigger. And there is live music and performance all day, with over 20 groups taking to the stage. Genres span jazz to reggae, spoken word to Aztec dance, taiko drumming to local circus performers. A number of local bands make their First Night debut this year, including indie rockers The Fragonards, soul and funk group Los Survivors and singer/songwriter Casey Frazier.

There is also a "kids' night out," with an emphasis on early shows ending with a twilight procession – featuring glow-in-the-dark fun – at 5:30pm. There's a "home-by-9" itinerary for those who may have another New Year's party to hit (or maybe you actually want to be home by 9pm).

You can stay all day or show up in the evening, closing out 2024 to tunes by the Latin Jazz Collective playing in the Monterey Conference Center, one of 15-plus venues throughout downtown Monterey. Ultimately it's a mix-and-match experience.

**AFTER THE FIRST FIRST NIGHT MONTEREY** ended in the wee hours of 1993, Peterson and Lynch remember sweeping up confetti in Custom House Plaza, thrilled by how well attended and received it was. "It was just the two of us at 1am, deliriously happy with how it went," Peterson remembers.

These days, it's a small army of 65 volunteers who work to make the event happen. (Lynch and Peterson continue to volunteer year after year.)

Lynch and Peterson remember launching 32 years ago at a time when Alvarado Street was in need of serious revitalization, and many storefronts were empty – bringing foot traffic to downtown Monterey was, at the time, something of a novelty. "It ended up with staying power," Lynch notes.

That applies not just to the famous New Year's event, but to First Night more broadly. It is a nonprofit organization that offers arts outreach programs in Monterey and Greenfield year-round, with workshops and classes in everything from painting to dancing.

First Night is about setting the stage for a great year ahead – and it's also about celebrating creativity on New Year's and all year long.

"First Night is all about community," Martin says.

**FIRST NIGHT MONTEREY** 3pm-midnight Tuesday, Dec. 31 (view complete schedule on p. 25). Venues throughout downtown Monterey. \$31; \$20/youth ages 6-15; free/children 5 and under; \$102/family pack (two adults, two youth). 373-4778, [firstnightmonterey.org](http://firstnightmonterey.org).

## CALENDAR Post Event

- Music/Stage  
**"Spirits of the Sea" Native American Flute & Drumming Circle**  
Thu, Dec 26, 2024
- Art/Exhibits  
**ART IS UNIQUE!**  
Thu, Dec 26, 2024
- Music/Stage  
**Vinyl Thursdays**  
Thu, Dec 26, 2024
- Music/Stage  
**Vinyl & Wine**  
Thu, Dec 26, 2024
- Workshop/Classes  
**Kundalini Yoga with Sukhmandir**  
Thu, Dec 26, 2024

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN JUST ONE MILE!**

**NORTH FREMONT**  
BUSINESS DISTRICT of MONTEREY

**VIP Discount Card**  
Great Savings!  
Check out the Special Offers for the businesses along North Fremont Street at [NorthFremontMonterey.org](http://NorthFremontMonterey.org)

Salinas HEALTH

Your baby, your care, our focus  
Call 831-757-DOCS today for an appointment.

Salinas HEALTH

Your baby, your care, our focus  
Call 831-757-DOCS today for an appointment.

## SUBSCRIBE

Sign up for our flagship newsletter, with daily local news, inspiration, arts, opinion and more.

**SUBSCRIBE**

Tags [First Night Monterey](#) [New Year's Eve](#) [Community Celebration](#) [Introspection](#) [Creative Arts](#) [Monterey Events](#) [2024 Celebrations](#) [See](#)

**Sara Rubin**  
 X ✉  
 ★ FOLLOW SARA RUBIN

(0) COMMENTS

Welcome to the discussion.

**LOG IN**