

It's not easy being green and eschewing meat

The largest vegetarian group in the Bay Area is based in sleepy Montara

By JEANINE GORE
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When Chris James started the group three years ago, all he really wanted were a few new friends.

He never dreamed he'd end up with more than 1,500 of them.

James and his wife founded Bay Area Vegetarians in 2003 as a way for vegetarian and animal rights people to connect and find support with other like-minded individuals.

At the time, they figured it would just be a close-knit group of veggie-lovers. And in a way, it is.

"It's grown; it's gotten huge," James said. "We're one of the biggest (locally-based vegetarian groups) in North America.

Since its inception, the Bay Area Vegetarians, which was originally called "CoastVeg" has blossomed tremendously. Hundreds of meat-eschewing people from around the Bay Area have joined the Montara-based organization, which recently attained nonprofit status. By joining, they are put in touch with more than a dozen vegetarian and vegan-related opportunities each month, which range from educational benefits such as spreading the gospel of a plant-based diet to the purely recreational, including annual camping trips, potlucks or movie outings.

The organization, which communicates via its Web site through electronic bulletin boards and mailing lists, welcomes everyone, meat-eaters or not, James said.

"You don't have to be vegetarian to join the group. We have a lot of people that aren't vegetarians; they just want to try different things," he said.

For newfound herbivores and those people attempting to be, the group has specially appointed "veggie mentors" on hand to explain the ins and outs of vegetarian cooking and living.

James, who has gone without meat for 15 years, is vegan, meaning he tries not to use or consume animal products in any form.

With the pervasiveness of animal products in American culture, he admits his is an almost unattainable goal.

"There's no meat in my house, no leather, but animal by-products are hid-



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Chris James and his wife Tammy Lee sit outside their Montara home. Both are vegetarians and founders of the Bay Area Vegetarians.

den in everything," he said. "There is no way you can be 100 percent pure vegan. The only 100 percent vegan is a dead vegan."

The Montara-based group Bay Area Vegetarians wants you to take part in the "Great American Meat Out" on March

20, which invites people to go meat-free at least for a day. On Saturday, March 19 the group is hosting a free film screening of "The Emotional World of Farm Animals" at the Pacifica Library on 104 Hilton Way. Doors open at 2:30 p.m. An RSVP to the Web site is requested.