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IN THIS ISSUE:

HUGE SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA VICTORY

VICTORY AT RINCÓN,
PUERTO RICO

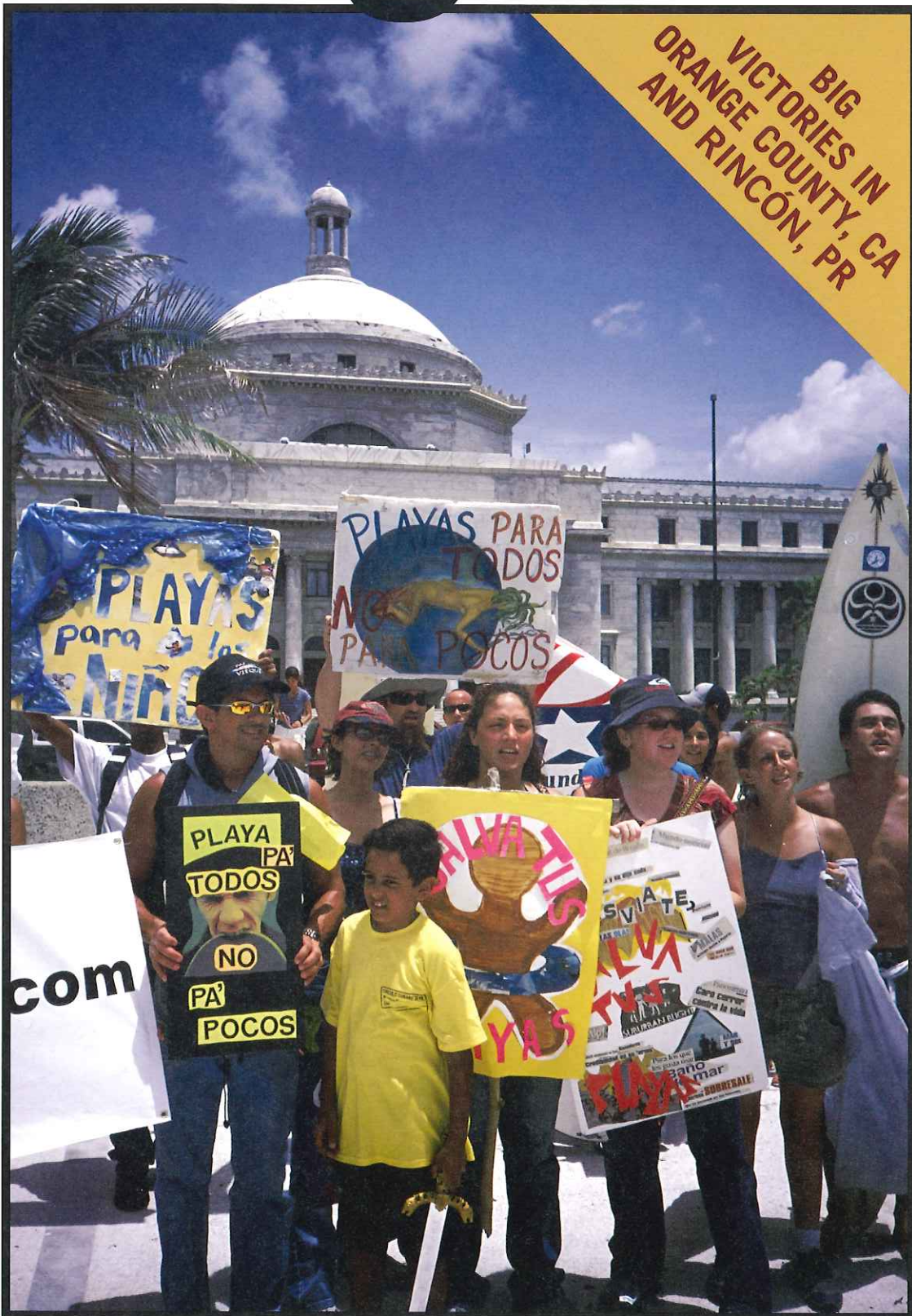
CHAPTER ECO-
ACTIVISM REPORTS

SANTA CRUZ SURF
SPOT VALUE STUDY

BEACH PRESERVATION
HAWAIIAN STYLE

SURFRIDER BEACH
SAND REPORT PART I

SF MEMBERSHIP
DRIVE UPDATE





VICTORY IN PUERTO RICO

Photo: Puerto Rico Chapter Activists join the chapter "paleteo" to draw attention to the importance of protecting the Northeastern Ecological Corridor and Rincón.

The Salva Tres Palmas Campaign in Rincón, Puerto Rico takes a major step toward permanent protection by Chad Nelsen

It would be easy to declare victory in Rincón, Puerto Rico today. A massive hotel and villa project known as Villa Ikaria was denied by the Puerto Rico Planning Board for the second and final time. Miguel Sarriera, Surfrider Foundation's pro-bono attorney in Puerto Rico, explained after the developer's appeal to the Planning Board was denied, the developer's only remaining options are to appeal the decision to the courts (extremely unlikely) or start from scratch and submit a new project.

Villa Ikaria was denied by the Planning Board because it was deemed inappropriate for the character of the community and would have had detrimental effects on the endangered coral reefs offshore. Is this worthy of celebration? Absolutely! Puerto Rico is synonymous with the approval of poorly planned projects that destroy the environment in the name of unproven economic progress. We have taken a tremendous first step in protecting Rincón. However, we have set our sights even higher. Our goal is permanent protection of the coastal and marine resources of this community. We have won a battle, but victory lies in lasting protection. As Peter Douglas, Director of the California Coastal Commission and environmental sage says, "The coast is never saved, but always in a process of being saved".

Step back to the fall of 2000 when the Surfer's Environmental Alliance and Environmental Defense called Surfrider and requested that Surfrider join them in fighting three massive hotel developments in Rincón, Puerto Rico. Considering the beautiful characteristics of the town, the amazing surf spots, including Tres Palmas, and the quality of the partnering organizations, the Puerto Rico Surfrider Chapter and Surfrider National jumped at the chance to join this worthwhile effort.

For almost two years Surfrider has been working with a coalition of local organizations (La Coalición Pro Calidad de Vida en Rincón) and other nationally-based groups, with the objective of not only stopping these projects, but more importantly permanently protecting the important coastal and marine resources and the quality of life in Rincón.

During that time we have established a phased set of goals. One, stop these projects that don't belong in the community. Two, establish a marine protected area to protect the precious elkhorn coral reefs that are ecological gems and also create great surf spots. Three, establish a Special Planning Area to ensure that community development does not have a negative effect on the local environment. Four, establish a Nature Reserve along the coast to protect the reefs with a buffer, protect the beaches, protect beach access and protect the aesthetics of this beautiful coast line.

Our teamwork, campaign planning, chapter meetings, community activities such as beach clean ups, meetings with the Planning Board, and involvement of the community have paid off. The most recent denial of the Villa Ikaria project by the Planning Board states that the project didn't take into account the environmental impacts and that the developers failed to address several administrative issues regarding the coastal zone boundary. Hurray. With the other two projects lying dormant and this project essentially stopped, Rincón is temporarily saved. Now we can aim our sites at permanent protection. Stay tuned, we have just begun.

For more information on the "Salva Tres Palmas" campaign, visit our recently updated website: www.surfrider.org/rincon