

Chapter 9

Lompoc & Vandenberg Village

While Santa Barbara County is largely identified by its metropolitan southern shore, it includes an array of communities; pockets of humanity that defy the silver screen's attempt to pigeonhole this region. Lompoc, a locals' town with a rotating door for the military's migratory base employees, is one of those places.

The Lompoc Valley, located on the northwestern edge of the Santa Ynez Fault, has been the epicenter of Chumash life, not one, but two, California mission sites, a temperance-based community and the ornamental floral seed industry. In more recent years, Camp Cooke, now known as Vandenberg Air Force Base, has provided a fairly steady flow of work, and a mighty rotation of citizenry as the base has evolved from World War II training center to 21st Century space base.

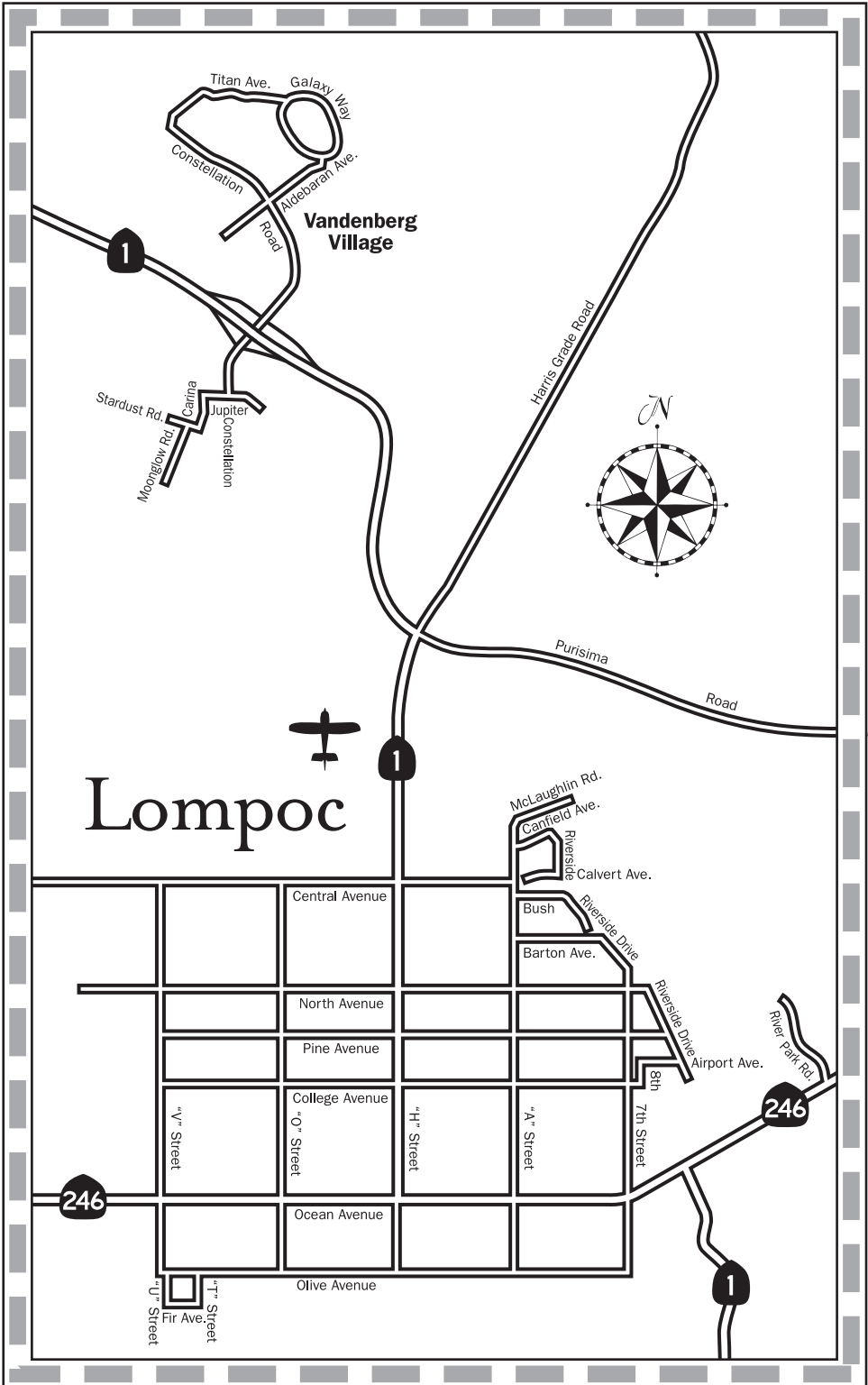
The valley is geographically unique. Once submerged in the Pacific Ocean, today it is home to the largest collection of diatomaceous earth in the world. The specialized material used in products varying from water filters to parasiticals is the result of a huge eddy that once covered the southern portion of the valley and provided diatoms a perfect home. The single-cell plants were able to form protective shells from high concentrations of silica — a volcano byproduct that may have saturated the ocean at that time.

A highlight of visiting this laid-back community comes each summer as hundreds of acres of colorful flowers decorate the valley with their banner of colors. According to the Lompoc Valley Chamber of Commerce, Lompoc was the Mustard Seed Capital of the World in the early 20th Century. When sweet peas were introduced, the community changed its title to Flower Capital of the World. The blooms are staggered from late spring through late summer, but generally peak in late June. The fields are easy to spot, but please stay on paved roads and pull completely off the road if you stop to take photos or plan to get out of your vehicle. It is also illegal to hike in the fields, allow children or dogs to run on these private parcels, or to pick any of the flowers without express permission.

To get to Lompoc from the north, take Highway 101 south to the Clark Avenue exit south of Santa Maria. Turn right onto Clark Avenue, left onto Highway 135, merge onto Highway 1 south, then turn left at Vandenberg Air Force Base to continue south on Highway 1, which becomes H Street in Lompoc.

From Buellton and points east, take Highway 246, which becomes East Ocean Avenue.

From the south, take Highway 101 north to Highway 1, which leads directly to East Ocean in Lompoc.



ARTS

Cypress Gallery

119. E. Cypress Ave.

(805) 737-1129

www.lompocvalleyartassociation.com

FREE

From the north, take H Street south, turn left onto Cypress Avenue. From the south and east, take Ocean Avenue into town, turn left on H Street, then right on Cypress Avenue.

This compact gallery, managed by the Lompoc Valley Art Association, features works of local artists, including painters, photographers, jewelry makers, ceramicists and others. This is an ideal spot to begin a tour of Lompoc's downtown murals. Open Tuesdays through Sundays from noon until 5 p.m. during summer months, noon until 4 p.m. in winter months.

The gallery is adjacent to Centennial Square (p. 154) and across the street from the Lompoc Museum (p. 151).

Gemini Twin Theater

1028 North H St.

(805) 736-1306

\$

From the north, take H Street into town. From the south and east, take Ocean Avenue west, then turn left onto H Street.

This aging theater includes two screens showing first-run movies, and of course a snack bar and restrooms.

Grossman Gallery

Lompoc Library

501 East North Ave.

(805) 736-3477

www.cityoflompoc.com/library

FREE

From the north, take H Street south, then turn left onto North Avenue. From the south and east, take Ocean Avenue west, turn right onto A Street, then left onto North Avenue.

Located inside the city's library (p. 148), this gallery features new exhibits of local artists monthly. Open during library hours.

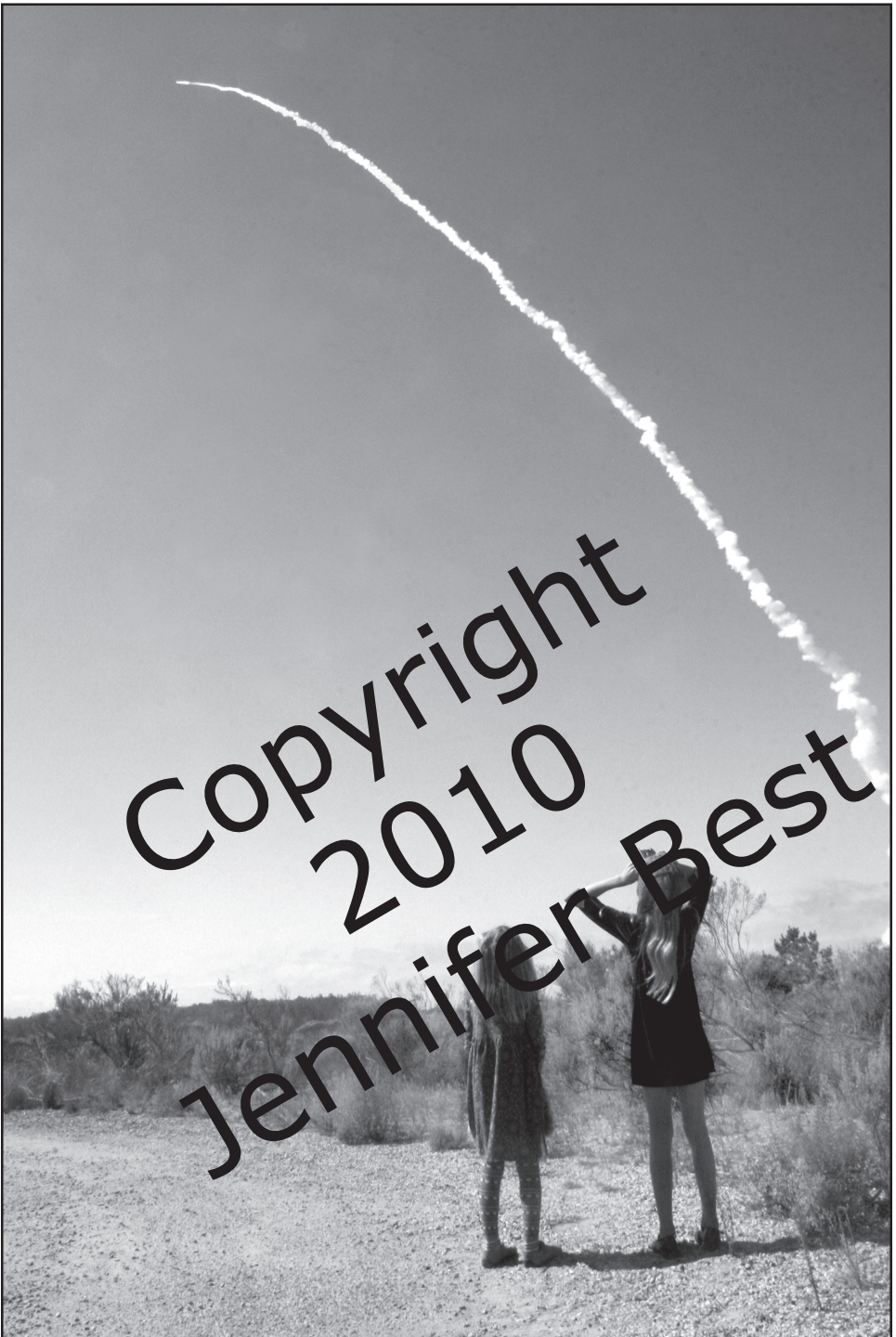
+ Lompoc Mural Walk

Downtown Lompoc

(805) 736-4567

www.lompocmurals.com

FREE



Bleacher seating and launch countdown announcements are provided at the Corral Road public viewing area. Take Lompoc-Casmalia Road north from Highway 1, then turn right onto Corral Road. For launch schedule, visit www.vandenberg.af.mil.