

COPA Celebrates 15th Anniversary with Convention

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SALINAS — **Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA)** will be hosting a special convention to celebrate its 15th anniversary Sunday in Salinas.

Founded in 2003, COPA is a nonprofit spanning Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Twenty-two institutions, including churches, synagogues, public schools and other organizations make up COPA. In South Santa Cruz County, COPA members include the Watsonville First United Methodist Church, Alianza School, Watsonville Lutheran Community Church and Assumption Catholic in Pajaro.

Affiliated nationally with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the umbrella organization's mission is to bring groups together to address issues on a broader level, aiming to build up communities through social action.

"Our main goal is to organize these institutions to work together," Lead Organizer Tim McManus said. "We seek to embody the best of democracy."

The convention will be held at Sherwood Hall, 940 N. Main St. in Salinas, from 3-5 p.m. on Sunday.

Public officials, including Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend and Congressman Jimmy Panetta, will be attending Sunday's convention. The event will focus on four primary issues: health care, affordable housing, immigration and mental health/addiction.

"All of these issues impact our community greatly," said Clarice Wiggins, a COPA leader with the Watsonville First United Methodist Church. "This is a way to raise awareness."

According to McManus, the convention will be unique in that politicians will be the ones listening to the community.

"The people will be front and center," McManus said. "They will be the ones demanding commitment from our elected officials, and not the other way around."