

Greens Get Wired at Zuma's Prior to National Convention

BY SARAH HORTON

Hunched over his computer, local Green Party member Steven Schmidt puts the final flourishes on the 100-page national Green Party Platform he has been preparing for the past two months. Schmidt and a national platform committee including 10 other local Greens will present it at the Green Party's National Convention in Los Angeles this week.

As he works, the faint strains of Soundgarden wash over the speakers. Soft explosions of napalm bombs and the screeches of rocket launchers emerge from a backroom. Schmidt squints intently at his computer terminal, named after the Greek muse, Thalia, and stirs a Smart Drink, fruit juice laced with "thought-enhancing" amino acids.

Schmidt is finishing the national platform at Zuma's Electronic Cafe, in whose salon-like atmosphere Santa Fe county's Green Party has found an informal home. Every Wednesday evening, Santa Fe Greens meet at Zuma's to conduct business in its living room and network with Greens spread across the Worldwide Web in the Blue Room in back. The Cafe does not share any formal affiliations with the Green Party, managers are quick to say — mainly "good energy" and a penchant for grassroots politics.

"You could call us the informal home to the Green Party's national web site," said Cafe co-founder Michael Kott. The web page is officially based at Santa Fe Online, also home to the Republican and Democratic national campaign web sites, but the Green Party's site received its finishing touches at the hands of Zuma's techies.

In keeping with the salon spirit, Zuma's also has found its living room home to other grassroots groups, ranging from a Mac-user support group to SETI, a UFO-interest group.

It is appropriate that the Green Party national party's web page should be located in Santa Fe, says Schmidt, because the idea for the Party's first national campaign has local roots. Schmidt and two California

Greens presented the idea of a presidential bid to the first Green Party National Conference in Albuquerque last summer. The trio approached consumer advocate Ralph Nader to be their presidential candidate, and he accepted.

Then Schmidt and a 30-member electronic Platform Committee set to work drafting Platform 96. Members contribute to the platform via the Internet from East and West coasts. But the core platform is modeled after New Mexico's state platform, which Schmidt himself had drafted in 1994.

"A lot of people read our platform and were really impressed, and that became the model for a national platform that could also reach a lot of people," he says.

The state Green Party's gubernatorial bid in New Mexico in 1994 — with Schmidt for lieutenant governor and Roberto Mondragon for governor — helped expand the movement locally, say local Greens. New Mexico ties California for the highest percentage of voters registered Green, (though still under 1 percent). The state is one of 13 with elected Green officials, including Santa Fe Municipal Judge Fran Sena Gallegos and City Councilor Cris Moore.

"A lot of states are looking to New Mexico as a model for organizing Green Parties," says Moore, who is also a New Mexico Green Party delegate. "That's why it's time we helped put together a national race that could also reach a lot of people."

According to its national platform, the Green Party aims to reach voters looking for an alternative politics, among them "independent voters, the unaffiliated, non-voters and disenfranchised." Schmidt hopes the Green Party's key planks — environment-friendly reforms, campaign finance reform, proportional representation and regulation of lobbyists — will have particular appeal to a younger generation weary of politics-as-usual. In 1994, the Green Party ticket for governor won the vote among 18 to 29-year-olds.

And the way to reach young people is through their computers, he says. "The Greens are very strong with the young generation," Schmidt says. "And young peo-



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ple know the Net. They use it more than their parents."

But if the Greens are looking to tap into the younger generation, they are unlikely to find many votes among the video-game playing group of 20-somethings this Sunday evening.

"Refresh my memory. What are the Greens again?" queried one 25-year-old in a goatee at a computer nearby, while maneuvering a laser gun to blast enemy spaceships in "Dark Forces." He says he gets his news from 'zines, the Internet and some dailies, although his Internet use is fast outpacing his news intake now that he bought his monthly account at Zuma's.

He doesn't expect most of his friends to vote, even though "a lot are registered." Those who do will vote Democratic or Independent, he says.

Noah Zisman, a 23-year-old film student, said he was keeping tabs on the political race via the Internet but didn't find much that spoke to his age-group. Zisman said he found political parties' attempts to

"speak the language" of the younger generation by posting web sites more amusing than informative.

On the Republican campaign's web site, he was surprised to find a visual image of Bob Dole — looking uncomfortably out of place. "It was really mediocre tech," he says. "He seems so far away from my generation to begin with, but digitized, he looked awkward and clunky."

Zisman said he's skeptical about what the Democrats have to offer, but he's even more doubtful that the Greens could shake up the two-party system. "I don't know enough about it really, but I think a vote for the Greens is a vote against Clinton," he says. "The chances seem slim they'll win."

Schmidt says the Green Party is attempting to reach out to all those looking for a third party, but has not necessarily targeted the 20-somethings at Zuma's specifically. "The campaign's goal," he says, is to "grow an independent alternative politics that young people in general can look forward to and feel good about." ■