A photograph of a man's back, seen from behind. He has a large tattoo on his upper back that reads "Santa Cruz County" in a stylized, gothic font, with a five-pointed star between "Santa" and "Cruz", and two smaller stars flanking "County". A tattoo artist's hand, wearing a green glove, is visible on the right side of the man's back, holding a tattoo machine and applying ink to the tattoo. The man's skin is fair, and his hair is dark. The background is dark and out of focus.

## Bold. Beautiful. Best.

That's the vibe of our annual readers' poll, now in its 24th year. Our latest soiree into the Best of Santa Cruz County covers more territory, more winners, more photos—just more. While we discovered plenty of surprises along the way, none stood out more than Santa Cruz's titular Umbrella Man nearly tying with Assemblyman John Laird in the Mover & Shaker category, proving perhaps, that even an entity that hardly moves, is capable of moving people. Regardless, there's plenty to soak up here.

## Some tidbits ...

**Best Quote:** "The place is like a submarine: we get a hole in it, we all go down ..."—from the person who won Best Bartender (page 36).

**Close Calls:** The **Best Massage Practitioner** category, which was nearly a tie between Anna Marie Wilson and Tonic's Joanna Eskilsen. See who won on page 33.

And, do us a favor. Next year, think of a more creative place to get naked. (You live in Santa Cruz County, after all.) See page 42.

**One last thing:** How nice to see that a corporate behemoth like Starbucks—true, the chocolate syrup is killer—did not win **Best Coffeehouse** this year. See what local entity nabbed your top vote on page 31.

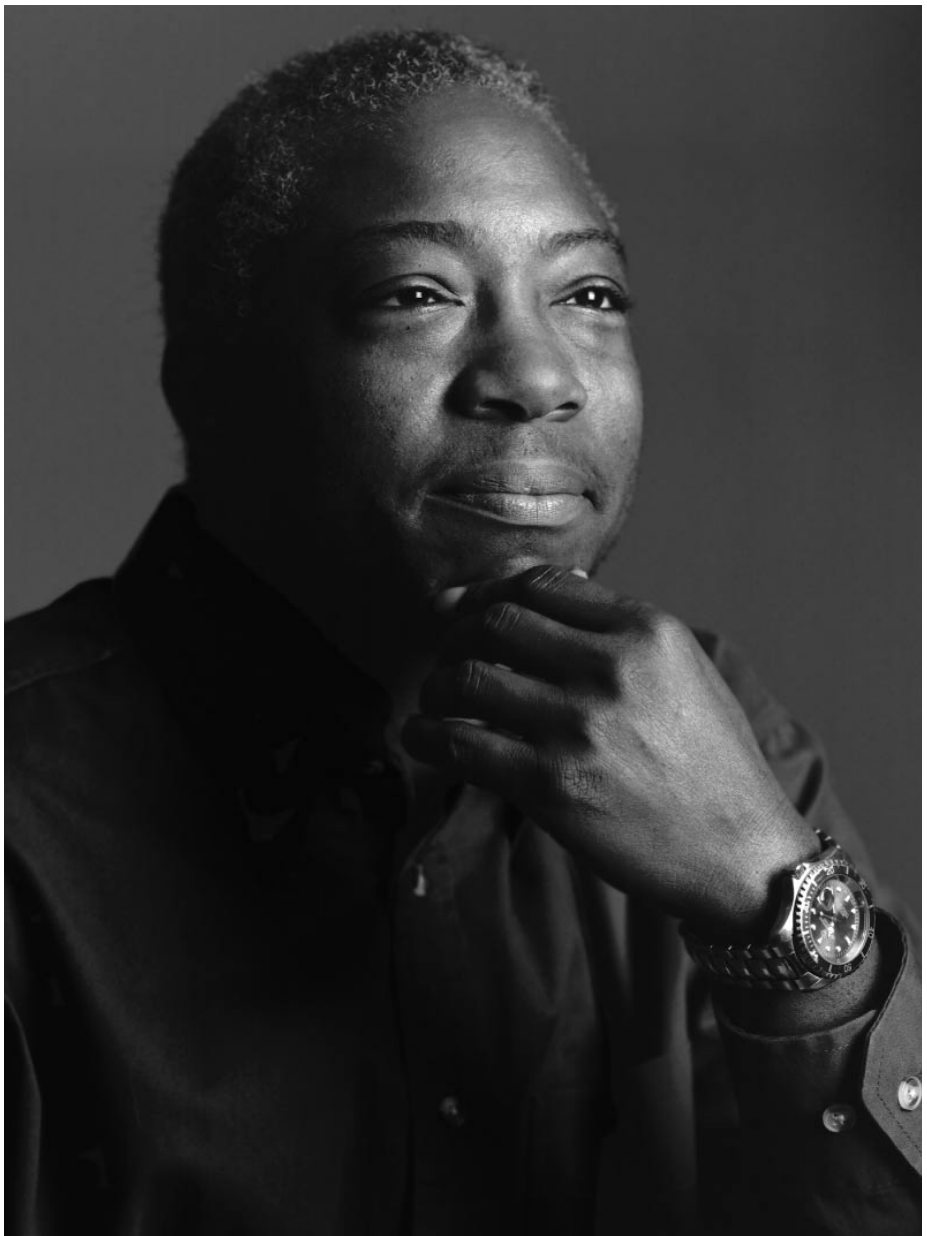
Readers that won the Best Of Dinner-for-Two: **Terry Sandlin, Susan Holgeson and Niki Nakda.** Congratulations.

Special thanks to *GT*'s trusty interns for their patience and determination in the tedious ballot-counting process: **Andrew Hodgdon, Henry Jones, Justine Lopez and Heather Paul.**

Thanks for reading—and voting. Dive in.  
**I Greg Archer, Editor**

# best





(Upper left) **Aidan** nine days after surgery.

(Left) **Lyle**: "I used to hate black men and now I am one."

## Photography Show

### 'Transfigurations,' Jana Marcus

Sure, it hasn't hit Santa Cruz—yet—but the buzz on local photog Jana Marcus' award-winning photo documentary "Transfigurations: The Making of a Man" keeps growing. The thought-provoking work, which turned heads and enlightened thanks to its brilliant pictures of male transgenders, hits the walls of The Attic (Best Gallery) beginning May 1. The show runs through June 30 under the title "Transfigurations" and includes female transgenders as well. A reception is slated for 5-8 p.m. on Friday, May 5. Marcus, whose photography has captivated the public for years, seems to have perfected the art of understanding subcultures of society. It's also garnered some awards: the prestigious Best Photos of the Year in both 2004 and 2005 by Photo District News of New York; included in The International Photography Awards 2005; the Phelan Art Award 2005; the Excellence in Photography Award from San Jose State's School of Art & Design; and The Center for Photographic Arts Awards 2004. Now, Marcus' work is about to hit the national spotlight when it heads to a swank gallery in New York state, adding even more polish to the perfect frame Marcus suddenly finds herself basking in. (See [jlmphotography.com](http://jlmphotography.com) for more details.) | **GA**



(Upper right) **Amber Lynn**:  
"I know where I'm going,  
because I'll never forget  
where I've been."

(Center spread) **Jana Marcus**  
surrounded by her work.

(Right) **Cait**, a female  
transgender: "My goal is  
to live an authentic life."





**Danielle** (above): "I am more than just a woman."

**Matt** (right): "I had been a man for six years when I conceived my son."

