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# Hey, Where'd Everybody Go? Santa Maria Readjusts

By [Rong-Gong Lin II](#)  
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As television crews packed up their fleet of satellite trucks, Carmen Jenkins was busy early Wednesday shutting down her coffee shop across the street from the courthouse and looking forward to a well-deserved break.

The Michael Jackson child-molestation trial was over and so was the financial boon and 15 minutes of fame enjoyed by many in this Central Coast town that only a few months ago was better known for its barbecue and Elks rodeo.

Not only did latte sales skyrocket at Coffee Diem during the four months of the trial, but Jenkins also rented rooms in her shop to several media outlets, including the British TV network ITN, which worked out of a rear dining area. She also let reporters stay after hours to take advantage of free Internet service. She even formed a friendship with Fox News legal analyst Greta Van Susteren.

"They touched our hearts, and we will miss them forever," Jenkins said of the 2,300 credentialed national and foreign correspondents who invaded the town of 90,000. "They changed our lives, and we felt very appreciated."

Indeed, predicting a boom in business, Jenkins had moved her shop to a larger location near the courthouse even before the trial started Jan. 31. It ended Monday in the 46-year-old pop star's acquittal on 10 counts.

On Wednesday, reporters for ITN left a poster inside Coffee Diem that said simply, "We'll Miss You."

Jenkins said she planned to use some of her profits to buy a new BMW and hoped to write a book on her experience, to be called "Standing Room Only."

Although some residents heaved a sigh of relief that the trial was over, several business owners said they enjoyed playing host to an international news event and were sad to see reporters leave.

Yong Pak, owner of BBQ Land, said his diner received about 250 daily orders from sheriff's deputies and television crews camped out at the courthouse. On verdict day, he shipped out 500 orders.

Pak said the newfound business helped attract more local customers to his restaurant, which enabled him to sell a small grocery store he also operated.

"It's been so successful serving the courthouse," he said. "NBC, ABC, and also the Sheriff's Department

Unlike the business community, Santa Maria police officials are happy the trial has ended. The 107-officer department had to order extra patrols around the courthouse, which cost \$266,000.

But the city has recouped much of its expenses from a jump in hotel-tax revenues and from charging media outlets for setting up equipment in city-owned lots next to the courthouse,

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said Mark van de Kamp, an analyst in the city manager's office.

So far, the city has collected \$224,000 in additional revenues, he said.

Meanwhile, extra security for the trial cost Santa Barbara County \$2.18 million, and officials have applied for financial relief from the state, said Jason Stilwell, an official in the county executive office. The county's current budget is more than \$600 million.

Neighbors of the courthouse are also happy that the media spectacle is over. No more noisy Jackson fans, helicopters flying overhead or parking problems.

Court administrator Darrel Parker said he is also looking forward to getting back to a normal life.

Parker, who often handled logistical issues at the courthouse, said he regularly put in 80-hour workweeks once the trial got into full swing. He said television cameras chased him around the courthouse every time there was a problem.

On Wednesday, he was still adjusting to a slower pace.

"It's funny, I got to have breakfast with my kids and see them off to school," Parker said, "the first time in probably a year."

Mayor Larry Lavagnino said he was proud of the way his city handled all the media attention. He said the trial was good for business and for raising the town's profile.

"It put Santa Maria on the map," Lavagnino said.

Gone are the days, he joked, when he would have to tell people, "You know where Santa Barbara is? We're north of that."

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