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## 'Real' New Millennium Approaches

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NEW YORK — For calendar purists, it's a one-in-a-thousand chance to get things right. For cities whose parties flopped a year ago, it's a chance for redemption.

Get ready – or not – for the Real Millennium, as opposed to the boisterous but mathematically incorrect celebrations that swept the globe when the Year 2000 arrived.

The number was nice and neat. But under the widely used Gregorian calendar, which started with the year 1, only 1,999 years had elapsed since the start of the first millennium. The third millennium doesn't begin until this coming New Year's Eve gives way to Jan. 1, 2001.

For most of the world, the evening will be more or less routine with few extraordinary festivities. But America's official timekeeper, the U.S. Naval Observatory, will hold a first-come, first-served open house for 3,000 people at its Washington headquarters to welcome the new millennium accurately.

"We always said the Year 2000 was the odometer effect – all those zeros turning over," said astronomer Steven Dick, the observatory's official historian. "We get the occasional letter or e-mail congratulating us for setting the record straight."

The observatory's party will be relatively sedate – no alcohol allowed. The mood may be different in Las Vegas and Denver, where civic leaders vow to make amends for egregiously unsuccessful celebrations a year ago.

"This is the real millennium," said Denver Mayor Wellington Webb. "Everybody else got it wrong, and we've got it right."

Denver officials were red-faced last year after extensive security measures, imposed because of previous post-Super Bowl riots, resulted in a near-empty downtown. One local TV anchorman, after showing spectacular fireworks and light shows from overseas, mockingly waved a police flashlight to portray Denver's light show.

This year, upward of 100,000 people are expected for a fireworks

extravaganza in downtown, capping daylong festivities on Dec. 31.

Las Vegas is also determined to redeem itself after bombing on national television last year. The city made news that night not for festivities, but for a young man falling to his death after climbing a power pole.

"I was being interviewed as the new mayor of the entertainment capital of the world, and I looked out and it was a dud," said Mayor Oscar Goodman. "Without fireworks, it wasn't New Year's."

Stung by criticism, Las Vegas intends to explode \$500,000 worth of fireworks in 10 minutes this New Year's Eve over the Strip. The police force is preparing for a crowd of 500,000, double last year's.

In Los Angeles, ridiculed for its fizzled \$6 million bash a year ago, city officials also promised to do better next time – in Y3K. Five New Year's Eve events last year drew an estimated 18,700 people, even though 87,000 tickets were given away.

"If anybody a thousand years from now gets ready to plan it, we'll tell them what not to do," said City Councilwoman Rita Walters.

In cities where partying went well a year ago, normalcy has returned. In New Orleans, for example, a New Year's Eve cruise on the steamboat Natchez will be \$140, down from last year's \$200.

In Philadelphia, party planners were able to dodge the "real millennium" debate and find another reason to celebrate.

The year 2001 is the undisputed 100th birthday of Philadelphia's City Hall; there will be a parade, fireworks and a tribute to the 695-room edifice – the nation's largest municipal building. The 650 couples who wed in a millennium ceremony are invited back for a first-anniversary toast.

In China, four cities hungry for tourist dollars are skirmishing over who sees the earliest sunrise of Jan. 1.

Wenling, on the coast south of Shanghai, did good business last year with its claim to have China's first sunrise of 2000, reporting 460,000 visitors and revenues of \$36 million.

That prompted similar claims by nearby Wenzhou and Linhai, plus Huichun in China's remote northeast. Projections by government astronomers favor Wenling, but the others are proceeding with preparations.

Elsewhere, little or no commotion is expected at places that drew throngs of visitors a year ago to see various "first" sunrises. Communities in eastern Maine, for example, plan only modest celebrations.

Britain, which billed itself world millennium headquarters by virtue of having the prime meridian at Greenwich, has also scaled back its celebration. Last year, there were fireworks along the Thames, and there was the Millennium Dome, the government's big idea for celebrating the new age.

The dome opened last Dec. 31 with a party attended by Queen Elizabeth II. Since then, it has struggled to attract visitors, required infusions of cash and is set to close after this New Year's Eve.

To add to a sense of anticlimax, London canceled this year's New Year's Eve fireworks show because of fears the subway system couldn't handle the crowds.

"I've organized major events all over the world, but I have never come against the inability to get things done as I have done for this," said Sir Bob Geldof, whose company would have staged the show.

For the Chatham Islands, the first inhabited land to witness the New Year, frenzied millennial celebrations are a thing of the past.

"We blew our budget last year and walked away with a huge headache," said Robin Preece, an organizer of the 2000 celebrations on the islands east of New Zealand. "But we had a lot of fun."

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On the Net:

U.S. National Observatory: <http://www.usno.navy.mil/millennium>

Denver: <http://www.denvergov.org/dephome.asp?depid1008>

Las Vegas: <http://www.lasvegas24hours.com/news.asp?Region47>

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