Lynn Foll watches the unusual procession every Saturday morning. His neatly dressed Loma Linda neighbors pile into their cars and quietly disappear.

That’s when the 62-year-old financial advisor usually heads to the supermarket. It’s the perfect time to shop, because the aisles are deserted, just like the city’s baseball fields, sidewalks and coffee shops.

While the rest of Southern California is buzzing on the first day of the weekend, the streets in Loma Linda fall still as thousands of Seventh-day Adventists gather in church for the Saturday Sabbath.

“It’s a peaceful, sleepy town in the morning,” said Foll, a former Adventist living alongside the growing number of non-Adventists who call the San Bernardino County town home.

The city is best known for Loma Linda University Medical Center, where in 1984 doctors performed the world’s first infant cross-species heart transplant: “Baby Fae” was given the heart of a baboon.

Less known is that the university and medical center are run by Adventists. Loma Linda, home to at least 7,000 Adventists, one of the largest concentrations in the world, has been governed exclusively by church members since it incorporated more than three decades ago.

Adventism, a conservative Christian denomination and the church’s holistic devotion to people’s health and spiritual well-being dominate daily life in Loma Linda, where biblical creationism and cutting-edge medicine exist side by side.

Loma Linda, California, famous for its groundbreaking medical center, is led by Seventh-day Adventists devoted to health and spiritual growth.

The city has a Ronald McDonald House to shelter the families of ailing children, but no Golden Arches. Most Adventists are vegetarian.

There are no bars in town, and at the city’s popular Adventist Book Center, the shelves are lined with volumes forecasting Armageddon.

Still, Loma Linda is no backwater. The population of more than 21,000 is downright cosmopolitan: Almost half the residents are non-White, and Adventists have Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Romanian, Spanish and Vietnamese congregations in town or nearby.

The city is an oasis of sorts, with low crime rates compared with neighboring Colton, Fontana and San Bernardino, according to local law enforcement data compiled by the FBI: In 2004, Loma Linda logged 18 violent crimes per 10,000 residents, while neighboring Fontana saw 51 and San Bernardino 133.

“You can really tell the difference when you cross into San Bernardino,” said nurse Rachel Mose, 46, a San Bernardino resident buying groceries in Loma Linda. Said Mayor Floyd Petersen: “In everybody’s mind, Loma Linda has a great reputation. But there’s also something mysterious about it to everybody.”

“We have spent an incredible amount of effort reaching out to the world,” he said, referring to the hospital’s international programs and the church’s missionary work. “We haven’t spent much effort reaching out to people that live five miles from us.”

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City Councilman Bob Christman noted, “In many respects Loma Linda is a different kind of community. I know we’re in the middle of a metropolis, but sometimes we act like we’re the island of Catalina.”

Latia Cunningham had no idea she was moving to an Adventist enclave when she left Fontana four years ago. She was drawn to the quiet streets and a diverse set of neighbors, but noticed something peculiar. “I kept wondering why I didn’t get mail on Saturday,” said Cunningham, 38.

Loma Linda is one of a handful of places across the country where mail is delivered Sunday, and not Saturday, in keeping with the Adventists’ Sabbath and by arrangement with the Postal Service.

The Loma Linda Market seems like a perfectly ordinary grocery store, until you search for the meat aisle. Cases of Morning-star Farms’ $2.69-a-can Tuno meat substitute are piled next to Worthington’s vegetarian Turkie slices. Organic shampoos share floor space with bulk barrels of spices and whole grains. The five-member City Council has historically enforced strict zoning laws against alcohol sales, reflecting the church’s teetotaling ways (Beer and wine are sold only at supermarkets and a few restaurants).

In spite of that inconvenience, Debbie Paschall prefers living somewhere with a pronounced spiritual component, considering Loma Linda a bit like Salt Lake City, her former home and the world center of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A nurse, she and her colleagues at the medical center will often pray before starting a shift.

“It’s good karma,” said Paschall, 47, a non-denominational Christian. “You’re working as a team, and everyone’s on the same page to help others.”

Pediatric heart surgeon Dr. Leonard L. Bailey said his Adventist faith complements the groundbreaking medicine he routinely practices.

“I think the health message has been fundamental to the Adventist philosophy of life right from the very beginning...”

Eighty-one percent of newborn patients with new hearts make it to age 5, said Sharon Robie, administrative director of the medical center’s heart transplant program. The institution’s heart care program was ranked in the top 50 nationwide by U.S. News & World Report in 2004.

Although Adventists reject evolution in favor of creationism, “variation within species – microevolution, if you would – is all probably all part of the original design,” Bailey said of Baby Fae’s baboon heart.

Adventists’ interest in healthcare stems from the belief that “the physical body is spiritually significant,” said Gerald Winslow, vice president for spiritual life at Loma Linda University Adventist Health Sciences Center, the university hospital’s parent corporation.

The church’s emphasis on free will leads Adventists to both value prenatal life and support individual choice with respect to abortion as well as in vitro fertilization. In addition, vegetative, non-responsive patients are allowed to be taken off life support if there is no chance of recovery, and church leaders are drafting an official position on stem cell research.

The nationally ranked hospital, which admits about 40,000 patients annually and averages one million outpatient appointments a year, sits among the university’s eight graduate schools, including nursing, medicine and public health.

Students are prohibited from drinking or smoking on campus and have mandatory chapel every Wednesday. The university also retains a religion faculty to teach a biblical approach to patient care.

“We are an avowedly Christian school,” said Chancellor Richard Hart, estimating that about half of the 4,000 students are Adventist, as are many of the teaching faculty.

As part of the Adventist ideal of healthy living, initiated by the writings of prophetess Ellen G. White, no meat is served in the hospital’s cafeteria.

The religion’s emphasis on nutrition and exercise has paid off. Adventist men live an average of 7.3 years longer, and Adventist women 4.4 years more, than other Californians, said Terry Butler, an assistant professor of epidemiology at Loma Linda’s School of Public Health and co-investigator in the new Adventist Health Study.

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Researchers intend to survey 125,000 Adventists to investigate links between diet, disease and faith.

The century-old university and medical center are the flagships of 6,000 Adventist learning institutions worldwide, according to John Banks, a spokesman for the world church. The private education system is second only to the Roman Catholic Church’s in size, he said. And local high schools are solid: Both the private Loma Linda Academy and the Redlands Unified School District, which serves area students, post higher SAT scores than the county as a whole, according to academy officials and data from the College Board.

Adventism’s spread began with the denomination’s official organization in 1863. Before that, church pioneer William Miller had predicted Jesus Christ’s return in October 1844, a blunder known to Adventists as the Great Disappointment.

Built upon Calvinistic Protestant roots, Adventism distinguished itself with Saturday worship, belief in Christ’s imminent Second Coming, or advent, and rigorous guidelines for daily living, including dietary restrictions and conservative dress.

Believers generally oppose homosexuality, and the most traditional church members shun fiction, movies and dancing. Even non-vegetarian Adventists avoid pork, in accordance with the Old Testament and White’s teachings, and strict adherents avoid all meat.

Adventism officially arrived in Loma Linda in 1905, when [Ellen] White stepped off a horse-drawn wagon on her way home to Napa Valley from a church conference in Takoma Park, Maryland.

The town, once known as Mound City, had been renamed Loma Linda, Spanish for “pretty hill” in 1900 by a group of physicians and businessmen. Shortly before White arrived, they sold their failed hospital to the church. It was because of White’s “providential” vision that the hospital was revived, said university medical center historian Richard A. Schaefer.

Loma Linda’s population swells to an estimated 50,000 during the day with employees and visitors to the medical center and veterans’ hospital down the street. The university and hospitals employ more than 12,000.

But 40 percent of the property in town is tax-exempt, according to City Manager Dennis Halloway. “We need more business,” said Mayor Petersen of the town, which lacks the major retailers that are found just over the city line in Redlands and Colton.

Some residents say the City Council, which has been entirely Adventist since incorporation in 1970, needs a non-Adventist perspective to remain impartial, especially in university-related matters.

“Loma Linda has become a brand name for the Adventists in a lot of ways,” said bookseller Leland Lubinsky, a non-Adventist who was born in Loma Linda, has twice run unsuccessfully for [the city] council and plans to try again in June. “There’s sort of a proprietary right that the university feels about the town as a whole.”

Three council members with university affiliations rescued themselves from a September vote on the construction of a specialty hospital that could siphon patients from Loma Linda. To make a quorum, Petersen eventually voted after drawing straws, something the council must do half a dozen times a year.

Local political fights don’t concern Linda Brown, 59, of Hesperia. She journeyed to Loma Linda University Medical Center daily when her 35-year-old son, Lance, lay in intensive care with a rare, life-threatening muscle disease last year. The staff restarted his breathing twice, and she has supreme confidence in the hospital’s care. He is back home, though still fragile, after 56 days in serious condition, Brown said.

She doesn’t have much faith in high desert doctors, Brown said, as her husband munched on sweet-and-sour tofu and noodles in the medical center’s meatless cafeteria. And the institution’s occasional “quirks” aren’t a bother.

“They could serve slop,” Brown said, smiling. “They saved my son’s life.”

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This article by Susannah Rosenblatt, LA Times writer, was first published in their January 7, 2006 issue. It is reprinted here with permission.
Scientists have tested shark cartilage supplements for treating cancer, and the supposed miracle cure flunked. Researchers from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, randomly assigned about 80 patients with incurable breast or colon cancer to take doses of either shark-cartilage powder or an inert substance that looked and smelled the same. During the two-year study, published in July 1, 2005 issue of the journal *Cancer*, patients consuming the cartilage lived no longer and felt no better than those taking the placebo.

The shark-cartilage saga began almost three decades ago when laboratory studies showed that compounds in the cartilage can block formation of blood vessels that nourish tumors. Shark-cartilage pills started flying off the shelves in 1992 after a popular book called *Sharks Don't Get Cancer* overstated the significance of those early experiments. Even the title was wrong: Sharks do get cancer, sometimes in their cartilage.

A previous controlled clinical trial, smaller than the current study, tested shark cartilage and didn’t find any cancer-fighting benefit. Indeed, the supplement used in the recent *Cancer* study was ordered off the market by a federal judge in 2004 for making unsubstantiated claims about curing the disease. The bottom line: Cancer patients should not waste their money – roughly $700 to $1,000 a year – on this fishy “remedy.”

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