



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian file

This float, named "Jungle Love," came in second place in the 2007 Capitola Begonia Festival. The float was made by the Tasha Silva group.

Capitola Begonia Festival blooms Labor Day weekend

Begonia Festival
Barrage of activities will highlight annual event *RP 8-2008*

By ELLEN HOLLAND

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In the early morning hours of Saturday, Aug. 30, a group of volunteers will gather in a field on 41st Avenue to harvest the vibrant blossoms of begonias. This effort, made possible by the donation of the Golden State Bulb Growers, will be followed by a slew of creativity as participants in the 56th annual Capitola Begonia Festival ready their floats for a nautical parade along Soquel Creek the following day.

The begonia festival, rooted in the moist,

coastal climate of Santa Cruz County that has provided hospitable growing grounds for the

tuberous begonia since the mid-20th century, is a three-day

event in the Capitola Village.

This year's festival will take place on Labor Day weekend with an array of activities that center on both the begonia and Capitola's intimate connection with the sea.

"We've got lots going on in those three days; it's just a fabulous event," said Joyce Murphy, a member of the Capitola



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Crowds were heaviest during the Nautical Parade in 2007.

BEGONIA

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Begonia Festival Committee since 1988 and current vice president. "One of my favorite parts of (the festival) is just seeing how everybody enjoys it."

Each year the festival is put on through the work of a dedicated group of volunteers that rely on fundraising efforts and the generosity of local businesses.

"All of the activities are free and they're focused on families," said Betty Mello, a volunteer with the Capitola-Soquel Chamber of Commerce. "There's a bit of everything for everyone and there's something to do throughout the whole day."

The festival got its start in the early 1950s as an extension of an occasion designed to showcase swimmers. Peggy Matthews, a local resident who taught swimming and staged the Capitola Water Follies each fall, saw wilting begonias on the Brown Bulb Ranch and, not knowing that begonias are propagated for their bulbs, felt the flowers were going to waste. In 1951 Matthews was allowed to pick as many flowers as she wanted and used the blossoms to decorate paddleboards during her event.

"The begonia fields are just spectacular," Murphy said in reference to the rows upon rows of Capitola begonias that provided about 90 percent of the world's supply of the flower from the 1930s to 1970s. "They're very brilliant in their colors."

This year's festival will officially kick off Aug. 29 with a screening of "The SpongeBob Square Pants Movie!" at dusk on Capitola Beach. Murphy said while she loves the nautical parade that takes place the following day, she is also fond of handing out popcorn to children on the beach during the film screenings, which will also include "Hook" on Saturday, Aug. 30.

"We suggest that people bring a picnic dinner and they can watch the sun go down," said Lin Banks, festival president for the last three years.

The highlight of the festival, the nautical parade down Soquel Creek, will take place on Sunday, Aug. 31. This year's theme is "It Came From the Sea," and the parade is set to include 11 different animated

floats. While the floats range in themes from "Octopus Garden" to "Creature from the Capitola Lagoon," one thing is certain — all will be covered in hundreds of colorful begonia blossoms.

"(The parade is) fantastic, the creativity and the people that are involved, they are just so enthusiastic," Mello said.

Before the parade, visitors are welcome to throw themselves into the spirit of the festival by taking part in the Begonias To Go, Head to Toe event in Esplanade Park. This portion of the festival, which will take place at 11 a.m., invites participants to transform hats and headbands into begonia crowns.

The 2008 parade is dedicated to the memory of the late Edna Messini, a longtime Capitola resident who served as the festival chair in the 1960s. Though Messini's efforts, the state legislature dedicated the week in which the Capitola festival takes place as National Begonia Festival Week for several years. Before she passed away in February at the age of 95, Messini could be seen sitting creekside during the parade for the last 55 years.

The activities in this year's festival will include a sand sculpture contest on the beach Saturday morning, a budding artist showcase, horseshoes on the sand, chalk art, various musical acts and an opportunity to meet the artist who created this year's Begonia Festival Poster, Ruth Koch, from 4:30 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 30 at Pacific Gallery, 321 Capitola Ave.

The festival will close on Sept. 1 with activities including a rowboat race and fishing derby.

Newcomers, Murphy said, often depart in disbelief of just how much fun they've had.

"It's just an extravaganza, and that is sort of our gift to our community and the people who enjoy it, whether it's the residents or the visitors," Banks said, noting it's important to the committee that people know that "they can come down and enjoy a wholesome weekend that's also a heck of a lot of fun."

A free shuttle will depart from the Capitola Crossroads parking lot on Bay Avenue every 15 minutes to transport visitors to the heart of the festival.

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For information on the event, including a complete schedule of activities and shuttle service, visit www.begoniafestival.com.