

# THRILL REMAINS, 90 YEARS LATER

Boardwalk

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PHOTOS BY JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

A woman raises her hands at the start of her ride on the Giant Dipper at the Boardwalk on Saturday.

## Giant Dipper roller coaster marks 90th anniversary

By Stephen Baxter

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**SANTA CRUZ** » For 90 years old, the Giant Dipper still knows how to rock 'n' roll.

Amid shrieks of joy from the wooden roller coaster's riders Saturday, leaders of the Boardwalk celebrated its 90th anniversary with free rides from 10 to 11 a.m.

Opened on May 17, 1924, the Giant Dipper is the oldest roller coaster in California and the fifth oldest in the nation, Boardwalk representatives said. The classic ride operates on gravity — meaning that the initial tug to the top is the only mechanical force it needs.

"Once you get over that first climb, it's all up to Isaac Newton to get it back, said Marq Lipton, the Boardwalk's vice president

of sales and marketing.

Gleaming red and white with a recent paint job, the Dipper originally was a natural wood color and built in just 27 days, Boardwalk leaders said. Safety upgrades have been made through the years, such as the bar locks down the riders' legs in each seat.

Initially, riders simply held on to a bar, Lipton said.

"We've adjusted the wood and the tracks, but things are mostly as they always have been," said Kris Reyes, a Boardwalk spokesman.

"The thrills it provides are as exciting and scary today as they were in 1924."

Tim Jones, a 60-year-old retiree from Santa Cruz, knows the feeling. He's ridden the Giant Dipper possibly more than anyone. On Saturday he stepped

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Visitors ride the Giant Dipper at the Boardwalk as the ride celebrated its 90th year Saturday.

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**On the Net:** To see a video of a ride the Boardwalk's Giant Dipper, visit [santacruzsentinel.com](http://santacruzsentinel.com) and click on this story.





JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Riders cheer as they begin a descent on the Giant Dipper at the Boardwalk on Saturday.

# Dipper

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off his 185th ride — this year.

Two summers ago, Jones said he rode the Giant Dipper 1,000 times. Last summer, he rode it 370 times.

Is this an obsession?

"Oh it's something to do and it's great fun," Jones said.

He said he first rode the wooden coaster in 1964 at age 10. Rides then were 30 cents.

"I like to be first in line, so I get here when it first opens," said Jones, wearing a T-shirt, short and a baseball cap. "I usually ride it a few times, and then it's time for lunch."

The morning jolt is "better than a cup of coffee," he said.

Saturday morning, Jones was among the first 500 riders who received a

## GIANT DIPPER FACTS

**Built:** Constructed in 47 days in 1924 for \$50,000. It's the oldest roller coaster in California, the fifth oldest in the U.S. and ninth oldest in the world. It was designed by Frank Prior and Frederick Church and built by Arthur Looff.

**Tickets:** Originally 15 cents, now \$6

**Speed:** Up to 46 mph on a 1 minute, 52 second ride

**Riders:** More than 60 million

**Fame:** The Giant Dipper has appeared in "The Lost Boys," "Dangerous Minds," and other movies. San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen once described it as, "A tooth-loosener, eyeball-popper and one long shriek."

90th anniversary pin to commemorate the Giant Dipper's milestone.

Operators ran two cars on the roller coaster rather than one to accommodate crowds, and the line of people was surprisingly short around 10:30 a.m.

Shelly Lucero, a 52-year-old from San Jose, wore a huge smile as she stepped off the ride with a girlfriend. She knew about the free rides Saturday

morning, and they planned to stay that evening for the first free beach concert of the summer, with the rock band Y & T.

"It's been a blast," Lucero said. "Santa Cruz is awesome."

She said that until Saturday, she hadn't ridden the Giant Dipper since she was about 10 years old. The thrill was the same though decades had passed.

"It's nice reliving your childhood."