

Memories endure as Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk turns 100

pp 6-1807

Attraction draws an
estimated 3 million a year

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Boardwalk

SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, the enduring salty dog of amusement parks, turns 100 this year.

Exhilarating rides, foods on a stick and pocket change entertainment are still the main attractions along a strip of shoreline that first hosted a string of bathhouses in the late 1800s. The Santa Cruz boardwalk itself was born in 1907, and it has survived even as similar attractions — like Toledo Beach on Lake Erie in LaSalle Township, Mich., and the original Myrtle Beach Pavilion in South Carolina — have gone under.

And while Santa Cruz doesn't have 100 mph roller coasters like Six Flags or Cedar Point, or rides themed on movies like Disney and Universal, it still attracts an estimated 3 million visitors a year. In fact, it is considered one of the last remaining gems of its breed, said

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BOARDWALK

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Dennis Spiegel, president of International Theme Park Services, a consulting firm to the attractions industry.

"It's kind of a page out of yesteryear. In our industry it's just revered as one of the all-time great operations," Spiegel said.

The Canfield family has run the Santa Cruz attractions since 1952, when Laurence Canfield bought a controlling interest in the Seaside Co., which operates the boardwalk. His son, Charles, started working there four years later, as a teenage ride operator in Kiddie Land, a collection of rides for children not tall enough for the larger attractions.

Today Charles, 67, is president of the company. "Technology has really changed amusement parks considerably," he said. "(But) the people are basically the same. ... They just come here to have a good time, sort of escape their jobs for a weekend."

The rides are faster now, but admission to the boardwalk is still free. A \$28.95 wristband buys you access to all the rides all day long, a bargain compared to bigger brand-name theme parks where one-day tickets easily exceed \$50. And unlike larger theme parks, the lines at Santa Cruz move along



Fireworks light up the sky over the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Saturday as part of a series of special events to mark 100 years of the boardwalk.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

briskly. The park also seems clean and spiffy despite its age, and the view of the ocean and the occasional surfer is part of the fun.

About 75 miles from San Francisco, Santa Cruz was a logical place for such an attraction in the early 1900s, when trains brought vacationers in from the Bay Area, the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, and farther afield.

The Giant Dipper roller

coaster, a National Historic Landmark, remains the signature ride. It began thrilling visitors on May 17, 1924, and its 500 feet of twisting track and wooden construction survived the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

The slow climb to the Giant Dipper's 75-foot peak is a tense affair. The small cars chatter and the cranking of hidden chains and gears gives the impression of something bad looming. Then you drop, and

your stomach is briefly weightless as you recall the deep-fried artichoke hearts you inhaled a half-hour earlier.

The boardwalk also still hosts a strip of hand-eye coordination games where dexterous dads impress their brood by winning a stuffed animal — the dime-toss, tennis ball-shooting bazooka guns and the old toss-a-rubber-ball-at-the-weighted-milk-bottles routine.

Games of chance and skill are housed in the main Casino Arcade, but the clunky, simplistic wooden contraptions of the past have given way to cutting-edge video games.