

Nostalgia, fun at Begonia Festival

Begonia Festival
Volunteers answer the call to staff 14 free events including nautical parade

By Jondi Gumz

jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com
@jondigumz on Twitter

CAPITOLA » Expect four days of out-and-out fun when the 62nd Annual Capitola Begonia Festival begins Friday with the theme “Begonias on Broadway.”

The end-of-summer treat, where all the activities are free, always takes place on Labor Day weekend with the help of an all-volunteer crew.

“Anyone not on this committee is missing out on a good time,” said Capitola resident Mary Beth Cahalen, who used to build floats and joined the organizing group four years ago. “It’s very nostalgic for those of us who grew up here.”

The list of events — 14 in all — is headlined by the nautical parade of vessels bedecked with begonias at 1 p.m. on Sunday. A sand sculpture contest, horseshoes, fishing derby, rowboat races return as well.

“It is all about participation and community interaction,” said Laurie Hill, Begonia Festival president.

This year’s parade will be led by a new participant, Capitola Surf and

Paddle’s eight stand-up paddlers atop boards decorated with — you guessed it — begonias.

A new community mural is the idea of Teresa Green, a retired engineering manager at Lockheed volunteering for her fourth year.

“It’s just so fun to see the kids all smile,” said Green, recalling the rowboat races. “People tell you stories about how they came as kids and now they’re bringing their kids.”

Starting at noon Saturday, attendees can place begonias in chicken wire to create a flower mural depicting the festival logo and fields in Marina where the begonias are picked.

The mural is already marked out with string, which should make it “pretty easy” to participate, said Green, inspired by the “Begonias-to-Go” event where people adorn their hats with blossoms.

The mural will go up on the grassy knoll behind the Esplanade bandstand to “create a stunning backdrop for photos,” Hill said.

Niels Kisling, a volunteer at the Capitola Museum, expects up to 500 people to drop by and see the exhibit of Capitola’s

Baseball Hall of Famer Harry Hooper.

Recruiting volunteers for so many activities can be a challenge.

This year, Barrett Cahalen, a senior at Harbor High, answered the call, organizing pals from the mock trial club and the senior class.

Between 10 and 15 students are expected to show up to help with logistics, set-up, and tear-down. They will receive community service hours and raise money for their class and mock trial club.

“It’s kind of a two-fer for them,” said Mary Beth Cahalen, Barrett’s mom.

Barrett and Friends will appear on the bandstand for the Friday night kickoff, performing tap, jazz and hip hop numbers along with five more local dance ensembles that include Polynesian, Zumba, and Salsa Rueda.

“It’s amazing there’s been volunteers stepping up year after year,” said Amy Ivey of Bay Federal Credit Union, based in Capitola, which is furnishing at least eight employees to help man the children’s art booth from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday.

Participating children will be able to take home an artistic souvenir.

Thea Luiten, the parade

chairwoman and 10-year volunteer, got hooked in while walking in the village.

“Somebody invited me,” she said, urging visitors who want to participate next year to look for staff in blue T-shirts and get on an email list.

A sand castle she built one year with five of her closest friends took second place and rated a mention in the Sentinel, Luiten noted with pride.

This year’s floatmakers are: Riverview Rascals, John Martorella and Nels Westman, who won the grand prize more than once; Casa Finkel and Dan Finkel, who took first-place last year and the year before; parade veterans James Wallace and Friends of the Windmill House; Michael Hansen and Joe and Gayle Ortiz of Gayle’s Bakery, and Randy and Cindy Swanson of Capitola Creek Creatures; Jill and Matt Arthur of Capitola Beach Co., using paddleboard power, and newcomers Ed and Sonni Carcello of It’s Wine Tyme.

Float drivers will face an interesting challenge: There’s more algae than usual in Soquel Creek and one of the parade rules is no body parts are allowed in the water.