



Flowering floats

Nautical Parade draws 5,000 to finale of the 47th annual Begonia Festival



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Passengers on the grand sweepstakes winner 'Surfing U.S.A.,' created by the folks at Westwind Surf Club, wave to to the crowd as they float past the Capitola Venetians. **Top:** Michele Bryant and friends won an honorable mention for their float — 'Those Lazy Crazy Happy Hour Days of Summer.'

Soquel Creek blooms with colorful entries during post-Labor Day tradition

Begonia Festival

By **CHRISTA MARTIN**
Sentinel staff writer

CAPITOLA

It was a lazy crazy happy day of summer. Begonias were everywhere — in hair, on storefronts and in the form of a giant margarita that floated down Soquel Creek in the 47th annual Nautical Parade.

God's feet even made an appearance. They were

pink feet. The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist won first place for its depiction of God kicking back on the seventh day of creation. It was quite an endeavor. The congregation even held a morning service, creek-side, to worship and protect their float.

The parade attracted about 5,000 people, said Betty Williams, president of the Begonia Festival.

Locals and out-of-towners lined the streets and the bridge for a glimpse of nine colorful floats.

The show kicked off with Miss Santa Cruz County,

Randi Armour, making her appearance in a small row boat bedecked with begonias.

"It's one of those healthy environment kind of things," Armour said of the parade.

She waved and smiled at the crowd, her sparkling tiara perched atop her head.

Following her was about an hour of laughter, shouts of excitement and groovy clips of music with every float.

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Begonia

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Plantronics floated a pink Cadillac to the tunes of Elvis singing Pink Cadillac.

The parade made its first big hit on surfboards 47 years ago.

It was the brainchild of a local famous begonia family member, Helen Antonelli, and her friend Vivian Benias.

They wanted tourists to keep coming back to the area after Labor Day.

Not only did they bring tourists back, they also created a tradition.

A Begonia Queen was a part of the original festival. The queen was the top seller of raffle tickets. She was later converted into a beauty queen, but the contest disappeared in the late 1960s.

The Antonelli Bros. Begonia Gardens donated blossoms for the first few years. Things started becoming too commercialized and they backed out, said Skip Antonelli, co-manager of the nursery. The Brown family of Golden State Bulb Growers has provided blossoms since then.

Scott Paine, a coordinator of the parade, said the festival stays afloat because of tradition.

"It's a fixture for the community," he said.

A theme of camaraderie was the scent of the afternoon.

Other events included a sand castle contest and commercial and residential begonia decora-

tion competitions.

Mindy Barrett, from the Lipton team float, comes every year.

"It's a common denominator. Who doesn't like begonias?" Barrett said.

She was in a wetsuit in the water, playing the role of a float pusher through the creek.

The kicker came in the form of the final float of the parade and the song that accompanied it — Happy Birthday. The crowd sang the tune to Capitola as the ninth float made its way through the creek. It was a giant birthday cake celebrating the 50th birthday of

Nautical Parade winners

Grand Sweepstakes

Westwind Surf Club, "Surfing USA"

Mayor's Choice

Sherri's Workshop, "The Shades of Summer"

First Place, Group Division

Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, "The Seventh Day"

First Place

Commercial Division: Plantronics, "Pink Cadillac"

Honorable mentions

Depot Hill Kids, "Campfire Kids"

Loch Lomond Celtic Society, "Nessie Goes Fishing"

City of Capitola, "Happy 50th Anniversary, Capitola"

Michele Bryant & Friends, "Those Lazy, Crazy Happy Hour Days of Summer"

Lipton, "One Fine day"

Capitola.

Everyone is a winner. All nine groups received trophies for their participation in the parade.

Behind the scenes isn't quite as glamorous as the begonias.

It's a yearlong process of planning by a core group of about 10 people. They raise up to \$10,000 just to keep the festival blooming.

The group doesn't stop there. They have already begun preparations for the 50th anniversary celebration of the festival.

Clean-up of massive begonias floating in the creek will take place today.