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Boardwalk: Fun For Thousands, Employment For Hundreds

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A poster in the general manager's office at the Beach-Boardwalk urges visitors: "Get a job at the Boardwalk—Cashiers, Ride Operators, Arcade Attendants, Sweepers."

And beside General Manager Dana Morgan's desk stands a genuine, handsome Merry-Go-Round horse to suggest engagingly that whatever job you get, your essential work will be to help Beach-Boardwalk visitors have a good time.

Providing good times for thousands of visitors and jobs for hundreds of local residents has been a Santa Cruz Seaside Company tradition since 1915, when it succeeded the Santa Cruz Beach Company as owners and operators of the amusement complex that is now visited, on average, by some 1.3 million funseekers annually.

"It makes you feel good to see them getting out of their cars in the parking lots and smiling because they are going to have fun here and forget

their cares," said Helen Pantano. "I tell them hello, to have a good time. I see them year after year and I remember them and they remember me. Some remember me well enough to bring gifts to me, and that is the kind of place we have here."

Helen is in charge of the four parking lots and is the Beach-Boardwalk's unofficial greeter. The four lots can hold about

1,500 cars. Sure, they get crowded and some folks can be belligerent when they are paying to park and have to wait for a place.

"But we get a good class of people, we get a lot of families and they aren't here to bother anybody but just to have a good time. We have boys who act as runners and we find the empty spaces as soon as they open up."

Helen's husband is a retired engineer and she is a retired librarian. They came to Santa Cruz 10 years ago. She took one look at the Beach-Boardwalk, found it exciting, said she would get a job, and was asked if she would like to park cars. Helen has been doing that for nine years . . . full time in summers, weekends the year-around.

"A lot of retired people work

here because they are good to us," Helen reports.

In the offseason, from today to next summer, Helen acts as a foster grandparent at Live Oak Elementary School. "Those kids need a lot of tender, loving care because a lot of them don't have two parents," Helen said. "I make cookies for them, give them a hug, take some home sometimes. Some of the cases are so sad, it makes me feel good to give them the tender, loving care."

For Irene Crawley, now a cashier but formerly a ride operator, her Beach-Boardwalk job posed very interesting challenges at the beginning.

"You don't want them to barf, you know, so you look for the green faces and when you see one you stop the ride and get them out of there."

Irene was talking about "The Spider," which is one mean ride and glorious fun for those who can stand whirling around while going up and down with sometimes alarming suddenness.

"The problem here can be the teen-age boys who naturally don't want to admit to their friends they are getting sick," Irene said. "When I see the first sign I cut the power to preserve their dignity and then get them off the ride in a good-natured way."

Irene started out with The Seaside Co. in 1978 as a ride operator and got the training to operate all the 13 so-called "flat" or carnival-type rides. She became head operator this year and recently was promoted to a cashier's job, which offers more work year-around. She ran upon the job accidentally while she was studying at Cabrillo (music composition), and she loved the Cave Train ride because of the dark and the length of it.

"Barf" is a carnival term for throwing up, and the trick on The Spider, where the operator has two engines to handle, is to give riders a good time without any such adverse incidences. You do this, Irene said, by keeping an eye out for a person who obviously is there for a good time. You put the ride into a flat spin for a little while and wait "until they think it is a cup of cake. Then you cut in the other motor and you get that person who wants a good time and give him or her a quick drop."

It is urgent to keep your eyes on the patrons if you want to

give them the fun they have paid for, Irene said. "I have visited other places where a ride operator just turns the engine on and then turns his or her back on the whole thing. That isn't right. We're treated very well here and we should treat our customers just as well."

The Beach-Boardwalk runs from April to Sept. 9 fulltime and on winter weekends and Easter Week, Irene said. She has worked in the off season at yard duty as a noon duty supervisor and done other work at such places as Soquel Elementary School. She has also worked in the arcades and trained new people to handle the floor. She expects to be at the Beach-Boardwalk for quite a while.

Kathy and Marshall Miller are two of many, many persons who got their first jobs at the Beach-Boardwalk in their high school years and then moved on up into satisfying careers.

Kathy is a native, Marshall had visited Felton during summer months. Marshall got his first job at the Beach-Boardwalk in 1964, Kathy got hers in 1967. Marshall worked first in the parking lot, then in Kiddie-Land, operating rides. Kathy got work making cotton candy.

They went on to college, Kathy to Chico State University to major in English, Marshall to Cal Poly. They married,

switched to UC Berkeley, and today are the proud owners of some popular Beach-Boardwalk concessions. They have the Sun Shops, the print shop and Pick a Pearl. These former student workers now employ about 20 students and rejoice as these, in turn, move up and out to bigger and better opportunities.

Marshall said the crowds at the Beach-Boardwalk have got-

ten a lot nicer and that the area is a fun place for entire families. He said that Santa Cruz is becoming a mystique, sort of a Carmel where things are happening. In the Sun Shops they sell many, many rainbows and he thinks this is a kind of symbol.

Kathy's father operated Andy's Auto Supply here and



Irene Crawley at 'Spider' controls.

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she participates fully in management of the Miller concessions, going with Marshall to shows of merchandise nationwide. The big challenge is to find things people want to buy, something not too expensive for the shoppers, mostly young people, to take home as gifts or souvenirs. A big success in the print shop is a printed license frame, while in the recently acquired Pick a Pearl concession you will be able to buy an oyster, open it and find a Japanese cultured pearl which you can then have mounted on the spot.

Hiring young people can be a major responsibility and pose special problems, the Millers say. For instance, you don't schedule a student for work at the time of a prom, and those who play in Pony Leagues have to be given appropriate schedules.

Pay varies, but \$3 to \$3.50 per hour goes to many.

Kathy taught for a year, but the family business interests and the family itself claim full attention now.

Marshall has done a customer profile and says his customers generally are high-school and college age people who want a memento that isn't junk.

The Millers recommend the Beach-Boardwalk for all families because "there is no admission charge and you can schedule your spending for as much or as little as you want."

Mechanic Rich Rice has worked eight years at the Beach-Boardwalk to help keep the rides in shape. No, he doesn't work on the Giant Dipper, the famous roller-coaster that has served Beach-Boardwalk since 1924. It has a special crew. But he works on the Jet Star and other rides, loves the work, the excitement of the area.

"A gearbox is a gearbox," he said when asked if the world of carnival-type rides requires a different type of mechanic. "A lot of rides do different things, but gears are gears."

"And this place isn't a carnival place. There is a world of difference between this and a carnival. This is more family

oriented."

For Morgan, in whose office the Merry-Go-Round horse stands, this is the fifth year he has worried about putting together and keeping together the thousand and one things essential to providing fun for 1.3 million visitors annually.

There are a maximum 870 employees, there are arcades, rides, parking lots, concessions a boardwalk a half-mile long, games galore.

Students who are ride operators (18 years and over) get \$3 per hour, others get less than \$2.90 per hour, but most from \$2.90 to \$3. Some 600 to 650 workers are students who use the money to further their education. Many come back year after year until ready and able to pursue other careers.

A big morale booster during the hectic summer months is a sort of Olympics for the workers. This runs seven to eight weeks, with two contests each week. This year there were 17 teams with 10 members each, and there were such events as a raft race at the mouth of the river. Bang-Zoom was the champion team this year and got \$20 gift certificates each for dinner at the Shadowbrook. The end of the Olympics was marked with a big pancake breakfast prepared and served by Charles Canfield, son of Lawrence Canfield, Seaside owner, and Morgan.

Now about that horse beside Morgan's desk. It is a museum piece for Merry-go-Round buffs because it was designed by the great Charles I. D. Loeff for the Merry-Go-Round of 1911. It was Loeff's son, Arther, who designed the famed Giant Dipper and opened it for business in 1924, the year the Miss California Pageant was opened in Santa Cruz.

A hallmark of the Loeff Merry-Go-Round horse is the veining along the cheekbone. Other hallmarks are the flared nostrils and elaborately carved mane.

Hallmark of the Beach-Boardwalk since 1915, it is claimed, is family fun for 1.3 million visitors a year and good, satisfying jobs for folks in high school, in college, in professional careers and in retirement years.



Kathy and Marshall Miller in Sur Shops concession.



Loeff merry-go-round horses in museum.



Helen Pantano greets visitors in Boardwalk parking lot.