

Boardwalk Gives People What They Want

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The demise of Playland-at-the-Beach in San Francisco due to lack of business, and the radical changes on the Long Beach Pike, such as the tearing down last year of the largest roller coaster on the West Coast, place the viability of the Santa Cruz Boardwalk in question.

Is it true, as a long-time Playland employe said, that people are "too busy for amusement parks anymore?" How is the Seaside Co., owner of the Boardwalk and Santa Cruz' largest taxpayer, faring in the purported shift in people's life-style?

"We're holding our own, I'd say." Skip Littlefield, advertising manager, Seaside Company, runs his hand over his thinning hair. "We've been getting small increases from year to year in

terms of people and the amount they spend."

An indication of how many come, and how much they spend is the \$3 million spent by the company in the last 10 years for capital improvements. In addition, three new rides will be added to the 16 existing rides before summer at a combined cost of \$20,000. Another \$50,000 will be spent widening the Boardwalk near the merry-go-round 10 feet, out to the Seaside Co. property line. The beach beyond the edge of the Boardwalk is city owned.

"We are quasi-utility, really," said Laurence Canfield, Seaside Co. president. "While the people are here using the beaches, they use our facilities, which, if we weren't here, the city would have to build." While the public uses the beach and facili-

ties, it frequently buys things and goes on rides.

Art Malquel, concessionaire on the Boardwalk for 20 years, thinks things are better than ever. "We built our new stand last year, which is an indication of how things are going. And this winter, we've had the biggest weekend crowds we've ever had." The people come because of the climate, Malquel says, and because the Boardwalk is kept clean.

"Lack of maintenance and poor climate is part of what killed Playland-at-the-Beach," Littlefield said. The park had been sliding downhill for years, he continues, and the owners had left the roller coaster deteriorate to the point that it was condemned by the city. The weather is not good for sunbathing, and the surf is too dangerous for swimming. Playland had

nothing to draw people away from other amusements.

The beach is the main reason people come to the Boardwalk from San Francisco, San Jose and the Central Valley. And as long as there is not a radical change in climate or topography, they will probably continue to come. But once they get here, the concessions and booths have to have something to offer.

"You know they are going to get hungry, so there is no problem there," Canfield said. "The rides are another story. You have to stay with the trends. I've traveled all over the world to look at amusement parks, to see what is being done, what people like." Canfield, who will go to the Expo '70 to see the Japanese approach to amusement next month, is particularly excited about seeing a roller coaster

there which has a ride time of five minutes. The Seaside-owned dipper takes two minutes, five seconds to complete its run.

"The dipper is our most popular ride, and our most expensive," Littlefield said. "We replace 25 per cent of that ride yearly, to keep it in shape."

Future plans for the prospering Seaside Co. include additions to the ondoor golf area to make a large amusement center which will be open in the winter on weekends, and in the distant future, multi-level parking garages on the company's two large parking lots.

"It's like any other business," Canfield concluded. "You find out what people want, and then you give them what they want."

Apparently Playland-at-the-Beach didn't give them what they want. The Boardwalk does.