

## THE CIRCLE GAME



A carousel rider plucks a tossing ring on the Boardwalk's oldest attraction, which turns 90 today.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

# Boardwalk carousel celebrates 90th birthday

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Guess which Santa Cruz resident turns 90 today? It's the Loeff Carousel at the Boardwalk. Delivered in 1911, the carousel has been spinning merrily ever since.

Originally billed as a "thrill ride" by carver Charles I.D. **SANTA CRUZ** Loeff of Denmark, the carousel arrived Aug. 3, 1911. At last count, it was one of only nine operating Loeff carousels, including one in the Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco, and one in Spokane, Wash.

The Boardwalk carousel, touted as a museum-quality antique, is one of fewer still that features a functional, old-fashioned brass ring dispenser, though now the rings are made of steel.

Vera Hope was born in Santa Cruz and remembers riding the carousel when she was a child during the Great Depression.

"We used to pick berries all summer to earn money to go to the Boardwalk," she said. "I always tried to get a gold ring, but that was hard. If you got one, that was pretty exciting because you would get a free ride. The carousel still looks and sounds exactly the same as it did then."

Loeff arrived in America in 1870 and worked as a furniture carver in Brooklyn, N.Y. Using scrap wood, Loeff carved his first carousel in his attic in his spare time. This carousel was sold to Coney Island in 1875 and instantly established the Coney Island style, which has become a part of American folklore art. The Loeff carousel at the Boardwalk is

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indicative of this Coney Island style.

All 72 horses are original Loeffs, carved meticulously from wood. They are famous for their spirit, quality and showmanship and are decorated with carved garlands, cherubs, tassels and jewels. Some prance and flash their teeth in a smile, while others are frozen in full gallop with nostrils flared. Each is carved with a muscular structure compared to the style of Leonardo da Vinci.

The horses underwent a major restoration procedure in the early 1980s at a cost of nearly \$2,000 per horse. Their chipped paint was chemically stripped, the broken joints were rebuilt and the time-worn details were reconstructed with wood putty and recarved. The horses were primed twice, sanded and painted again. Though originally painted in white and gold, the refurbished horses resemble real horses and run the color gamut. Ten of the horses had to be replaced

from other Loeff carousels.

"Some amusement parks have pulled off original Loeff horses to sell and replace them with reproductions. We prefer to keep the original Loeff horses out there for the public," said John Robinson from the Seaside Co.

The carousel cost \$18,000 in 1911. Now, just one of the horses could fetch as much as \$20,000 from a private collector.

The horses require continual maintenance and periodically are refinished and repainted by hand. Their tails, which come from actual horses, must also be replaced on occasion. All of the repairs are done at the Boardwalk by Seaside Co. maintenance staff.

The carousel still twirls to the music of the original 1894 German-made Ruth and Sohn 342-pipe band organ, one of the last of its kind. In the early 1990s it also underwent a major restoration project at a cost of \$25,000.

Keeping the antique mechanics of the carousel functional is a full-time job. Many of the moving parts are old and replacements are not easy to come by. Frequently, repairs require a creative approach, meaning some parts have to be created.

Five-year-old Abbey Pethman loves the carousel.

"It's the first place I come," she said.

She doesn't have a favorite horse but wants to ride all of them.

"Sometimes I haven't seen one before," Pethman said. "But pretty much I've ridden all of them."

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