SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL PHOTOS

'Hoe Down at the Beach' is welcomed with open arms as the float constructed by the crew at Gayle's Bakery and Rosticceria makes its way down Soquel Creek during the Capitola Begonia Festival's Nautical Parade on Sunday. The float, which took 20 people to build using 7,000 begonia blossoms, took third place, sending their $500 winnings to Native Animal Rescue.

Pretty in Pink

Nautical Parade floats delight crowds along Soquel Creek

Begonia Festival

By CATHY KELLY

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CAPITOLA — The beautifully pink begonia barge "Ballet at the Beach" captured the day at Sunday's Nautical Parade, a highlight of the 59th annual Capitola Begonia Festival.

The prize-winning float in the community-created fundraiser for local charities was anchored by two large, pink ballet slippers in the middle of a float created by the Begonias on the Bay group. Atop the float stood two young girls in appropriate ballet wear, and two tongue-in-cheek male dancers sporting pink tutus and performing a few faux ballet moves, all in good fun.

Second place went to a float by River Rascals called "Rock Around the Clock," which showcased some impressive budding Elvis impersonators with blossom-filled guitars. Gayle's Bakery & Rosticceria

ABOVE: Using more than 5,000 begonia blooms and the combined efforts of 25 people, 'Ballet at the Beach' was the grand prize winner.

LEFT: 'The Blessing Dance' constructed by the folks at Mai Tai Beach Restaurant brought a Thai influence to the theme 'Let's Dance'.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The Riverview Rascals' 'Rock Around the Clock' float took home the second-place prize of $750 for the Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

BEGONIAS

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captured third with a creation called "Hoe Down on the River" that included a barn, windmill and farm animals.

Seven floats were created this year, festival president Lin Banks said, and all made it under the Soquel Creek bridge near the beach, a contest requirement announcers used to create some lighthearted suspense.

Kyra Natale, 12, of Soquel said she would cast her vote for Ballet by the Bay.

"That one caught my eye," she said before the winner was announced. "I think it's really cool the way they make the floats out of flowers. I like that idea."

Her mom, Tyla Natale, said all the floats were beautiful.

"They are so colorful; they're just spectacular," she said. "We come for the parade every year."

The festival, themed "Let's Dance" this year, brought throngs of onlookers to Capitola Village on a partly sunny afternoon, and parties lined the yards of the homes fronting the creek to watch the parade.

It presented a fetching scene, with flower-covered barges floating down Soquel Creek with crowds clinging to the tree-lined creek sides and atop two bridges to catch a look. Several kayaks and at least one rowboat were in the creek too, some towing the barges, while others used motors. More than one float was accompanied by a theme song that added to the fun.

Other parade entrants included "Jungle Boogie" by Kool & the 6-1-1 Center Gang, Casa Finkel's "Skinny Deity," Friends of the Windmill House's "Locomotion" and My Thai Beach's "Raoyhm Ghuuay Praahn," or "The Blessing Dance."

One towheaded visitor from Modesto, 8-year-old Aden Boynton, said his vote went to "Rock Around the Clock," because it was "just neat." But he qualified that early-in-the-action remark by saying he had "only seen a few so far."

WINNERS

GRAND PRIZE
Begonias on the Bay's 'Ballet At the Beach'
Charity for $1,000 donation: Quest International

SECOND PLACE
Riverview Rascals' 'Rock Around the Clock'
Charity for $750 donation: Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

THIRD PLACE
Gayle's Bakery & Rosticceria's 'Hoe Down on the River'
Charity for $500 donation: Native Animal Rescue

His dad, Adam Boynton, said a group including his wife, Dawn, and some friends had come to the festival for the first time.

"It's awesome, just incredible," added Boynton, who gamely sported several begonia blossoms in his cap.

The festival celebrates the begonia's history in Capitola. From the 1930s to the 1970s, the vast majority of the world's begonias came from Brown Bulb Ranch. James Brown and family built a cottage along the dirt lane of 41st Avenue in 1911, according to the Capitola Museum website. When Brown planted begonias there in 1921, the ranch quickly became a worldwide producer. Seeking fertilizer for the bulbs, Brown bought 14 registered heifers and a bull, and began one of the state's finest Guernsey herds.

Mayor Dennis Morton, who helped create "Locomotion," said Saturday that the floats are typically constructed using chicken wire, wood and/or PVC pipe and covered by blossoms affixed by wire, which takes the work of many hands.

The flowers were donated by Brown Ranch Marketplace and Golden State Direct.

The festival concludes today with a fishing derby from 6 a.m. to noon on the wharf, a children's art and a "Move Hoops" display and tutelage event from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and rowboat races from 1-4 p.m.

For more information, visit www.begoniafestival.com.