

Whiting's Foods wins coveted award

Family business has worked at Boardwalk for more than a half-century

By NADIA DRAKE

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A perfectly served funnel cake, hot dog or chocolate-dipped ice cream cone adds flavor and a smile to a day at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk — and last week, Whiting's Foods, the largest supplier of Boardwalk treats, won the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions' Brass Ring award for their innovative approach to training a friendly and efficient teen workforce.

The "Innovative Employee Training Program" Brass Ring is presented annually, and since the

Boardwalk sees more than a million visitors each year, Whiting's Foods was facing competition from suppliers at large amusement parks all over the world. Whiting's Foods provides treats at 20 Boardwalk concession locations — including Dippin' Dots stands, Carousel Cones and Pizza Hut restaurants — and the family-owned business has played an important role in the Boardwalk experience for more than 50 years.

In the summer, Whiting's employs around 250 crew members between the ages of 16 and 21

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The Whiting family, pictured at the Boardwalk in 1958, owns the now-award-winning business that is the largest supplier of Boardwalk treats.

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as food and beverage servers. They receive between 800 and 1,000 applications for those positions. Key to developing a productive and hospitable workforce is training new employees using high-tech media that teenagers can relate to, and then keeping them motivated to do a good job, said Margie Whiting Sisk, co-owner and Vice President of Human Resources.

"We take teens for who they are today, given the world they've been raised in, with cell phones and the Internet," Sisk said.

Training program features include Youtube video tutorials accessible from any cash register, in case an employee needs to quickly learn how to dip an ice cream cone or properly mop a floor. Sisk calls each new crew member upon hiring, and a manager checks in with them after 120 hours on the job.

Employees keep track of their schedules through Whiting's Foods' website, and are notified of shift changes by text message. "We tap into how teens can be the most efficient in the workplace," Sisk said.

In addition, Whiting's



SANTA CRUZ BEACH BOARDWALK

The Whiting family at the Boardwalk in 2007.

reaches out to employees' families by sending a letter to parents telling them about the business, their expectations and the benefits of working for Whiting's; they also interact with coaches and others who play a role in their employees' lives so that work schedules can be juggled accordingly. "If you invest in them, they will invest in your policies and procedures and take good care of guests," Sisk said. More than half of Whiting's Foods' employees return summer after summer, and many have several generations of family members who worked with Whiting's.

Whiting's Foods was started in 1953 by Ted Whiting Jr. Today, more than a dozen

Whiting family members are a part of the business, including Ted's children Ken, Ron, Nick and Margie, and 13 of his grandchildren. Ken Whiting also founded WAVES for Teenage Workforce Success, which consults with businesses to develop solutions for hiring and employing teenagers.

Headquartered in the United States, the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions has branch offices in Belgium and Mexico and works with liaisons in Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, India, and the People's Republic of China to represent more than 4,500 parks in more than 90 countries.