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Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk celebrates centennial



The merry-go-round is still a favorite among ride connoisseurs at the 100-year-old Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Residents, visitors recall amusement park's storied past

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Boardwalk celebrates its centennial this year. In an occasional series, the Sentinel will examine its cultural, political and economic role in the community.

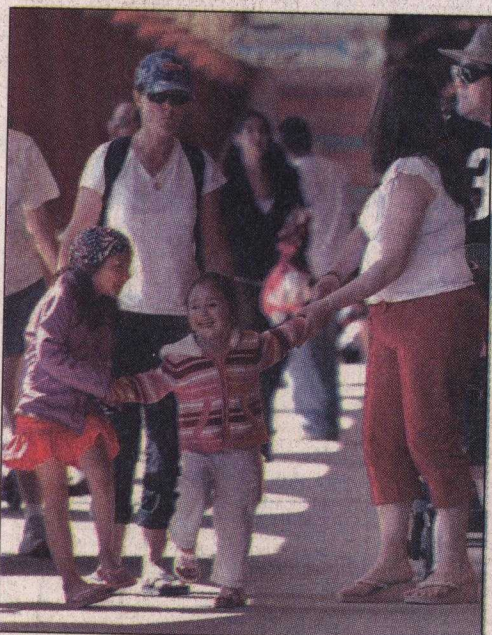
By SHANNA MCCORD
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Before the start of World War I and the invention of the Model T, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk bustled with business.

Visitors flocked to the sunny seaside amusement park created in 1907 by local businessman Fred W. Swanton to dance in the casino, dive in the indoor saltwater pool known as the Plunge and enjoy the beach.

The family-owned Boardwalk, born long before the bikini, celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

"It says something about who we are," said Ted Whiting III, vice president of the Seaside Co., which owns the Boardwalk, Boardwalk Bowl, Cocoanut Grove and the Sea and Sand



See BOARDWALK on PAGE A4 Strollers take in the arcade Saturday.

Coming Monday

■ Behind the scenes at the Boardwalk, sound engineer Donaven Staab is getting the amusement park's newest attraction ready for a close-up.

LOCAL

On the Net

Share your favorite Boardwalk moments, like the time you won the biggest stuffed animal on the rack, the ride you didn't lose your lunch on or the girl you kissed for the first time at the top of the Giant Dipper.

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Boardwalk

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Inn on West Cliff Drive. "The days of independent amusement parks are far and few between."

The Boardwalk is the city's claim to fame, the most visited spot in Santa Cruz, though many local residents take it for granted and often groan about heavy traffic the amusement park attracts.

Home to the famed Giant Dipper roller coaster and other iconic rides such as the Cave Train and Loeff Carousell, the Boardwalk has evolved through the decades as a destination that draws an estimated 3 million people to Santa Cruz each year. A large number of Boardwalk visitors come from the San Francisco Bay Area. Historical touches such as the cack-

ling Laffing Sal — previously part of San Francisco's former Playland-at-the-Beach and now located at the entrance to Neptune's Kingdom — is an example of what sets the Boardwalk apart from its corporate competitors, Whiting said.

Longtime residents say the Boardwalk's 100-year milestone is the result of the amusement park changing with the times and keeping up with entertainment trends while preserving its heritage and staying true to its local roots.

"Some of my earliest memories are from the Boardwalk," said local historian Geoffrey Dunn, 51, who rode the Giant Dipper for the first time when he was 8. "The sounds and smells are just so rich. I love being down there."

The Boardwalk has always been a family affair.

Since 1984, the amusement park has

been owned by Santa Cruz resident and Seaside Co. owner Charles Canfield, whose father Laurence Canfield took over the Boardwalk from Swanton in 1951. Today, Canfield's son Tom Canfield serves as vice president of operations, and Charles still runs a large part of the show.

In 2005 he chose to install the amusement park's newest thrill ride, the 125-foot Double Shot, and he recently flew to Indiana to buy a \$250,000 antique Wurlitzer organ for the Loeff Carousell.

Canfield, 67, says he has no plans to sell the Boardwalk to a corporate amusement park, though he often receives offers.

"I just don't have the desire to turn this over to somebody who may dismantle it," Canfield said. "I don't have a pressing need to sell, and I'd like to preserve the Boardwalk for younger generations."

"We're a unique entity on the West Coast."

The Boardwalk is filled with other locally owned businesses, including Marini's candy store, O'Neill Surf Shop, T-shirt and memorabilia stores owned by Marshall and Kathy Miller and eateries owned by the Twisselmanns and Whittings.

John Wilson, Soquel High School girls basketball coach, had his first job at Marini's in 1979 when he was 16.

The memories and friendships from that time are lasting, he said.

"I'd get there at 6 a.m. when no one was on the Boardwalk to get the taffy going," Wilson said. "In a few hours the Boardwalk was a packed house."

"When my cousins came into town, all I wanted to do was go to the Boardwalk."

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Centennial events

Several events are planned to celebrate the Boardwalk's 100th anniversary.

APRIL 21-SEPT. 2: Exhibit at Museum of Art and History.

APRIL: Launch of book about history, 'The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, A Century by the Sea.'

MAY 19: Salute to the Centennial, including Papa Doo Run Run concert, sky divers and beach high-diving performances.

JUNE 9: Cocoanut Grove Gala: 'Dancing Through Time' dinner, dance and entertainment.

JUNE 22-AUG. 31: Free Friday night bands on the beach.

JUNE 25-AUG. 28: 1907 Nights, 75-cent rides after 5 p.m. Mondays and Tuesdays.

JULY 8-AUG. 16: Moscow Circus, free performances twice a day, Sundays through Thursdays.

JULY 25: 'Lost Boys outdoor' screening, details pending.

DEC. 31: Centennial farewell at Cocoanut Grove.