

90 years of fun

Boardwalk plans birthday bash

Boardwalk

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Virtually every part has been redone, restored or replaced. "Venerable," is the word journalists like to use.

But, hey, even at 90, she still delivers the thrills.

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk ends its ninth decade Friday with an anniversary party to mark the oldest operating amusement park in California.

Even as the seaside playground celebrates its historic status, however, there are plans to expand.

If city officials have their way, a conference center and a 275- to 300-room hotel will someday share billing with the Giant Dipper. Seaside officials prefer something smaller, perhaps a 100-room hotel, says Ann Parker, publicist.

As part of the expansion, the Boardwalk may also move some rides and add new ones and parking. On the way back burner, an outlet center has been talked about.

It all began in 1865 when John Leibrandt opened a public bathhouse near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River. Others followed and scores of tourists poured themselves into the highly-touted "natural medicine" of bathing in salt water. More concessions sprang up — curio shops, photo stands and restaurants.

Enter Fred W. Swanton, a pro-



The rotunda of the Cocoanut Grove, shown in a 1910 Boardwalk photo.



Kids like Jessica Viss of Ripon have been grabbing for the ring since the carousel was installed in 1911.

Please see **BOARDWALK** — A9

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Boardwalk birthday

Continued from Page A1

moter/entrepreneur without brakes, who started making his plans about then. His plans were for "Atlantic City of the West," patterned after the Coney Island of Swanton's youth.

The first Boardwalk Casino, a penny arcade, opened in 1904. It survived only 22 months, burning to the ground on June 22, 1906.

Legend has it that Swanton was on the phone before the smoke cleared, lining up financing and ordering materials to rebuild, according to a history compiled by Jan Bollwinkel-Smith, Boardwalk spokeswoman. Meanwhile, the Boardwalk's summer events went on in huge tents erected along the beach.

By summer's end, famed architect William Weeks was drawing up plans, and by October the foundation was laid for the new Casino, complete with a ballroom, the Plunge indoor swimming pool that used ocean water, a pleasure pier and boardwalk.

It was 1907 when the Boardwalk reopened, the year the Chicago Cubs swept the World Series against the Detroit Tigers and the year Oklahoma became a state.

Exactly one year after the devastating fire, on June 22, 1907, thousands of white lights on the Boardwalk and Casino were illuminated as the rebuilt Boardwalk opened with a welcoming crowd of thousands watching.

The L.A. Thompson Scenic Railway followed — a four-minute coaster that ran on a mile of wooden track.

Next came the Charles I.D. Loeff carousel — hand-carved horses with jeweled harnesses with real hair tails and a 342-pipe 1893 Ruth and Sohn band organ.

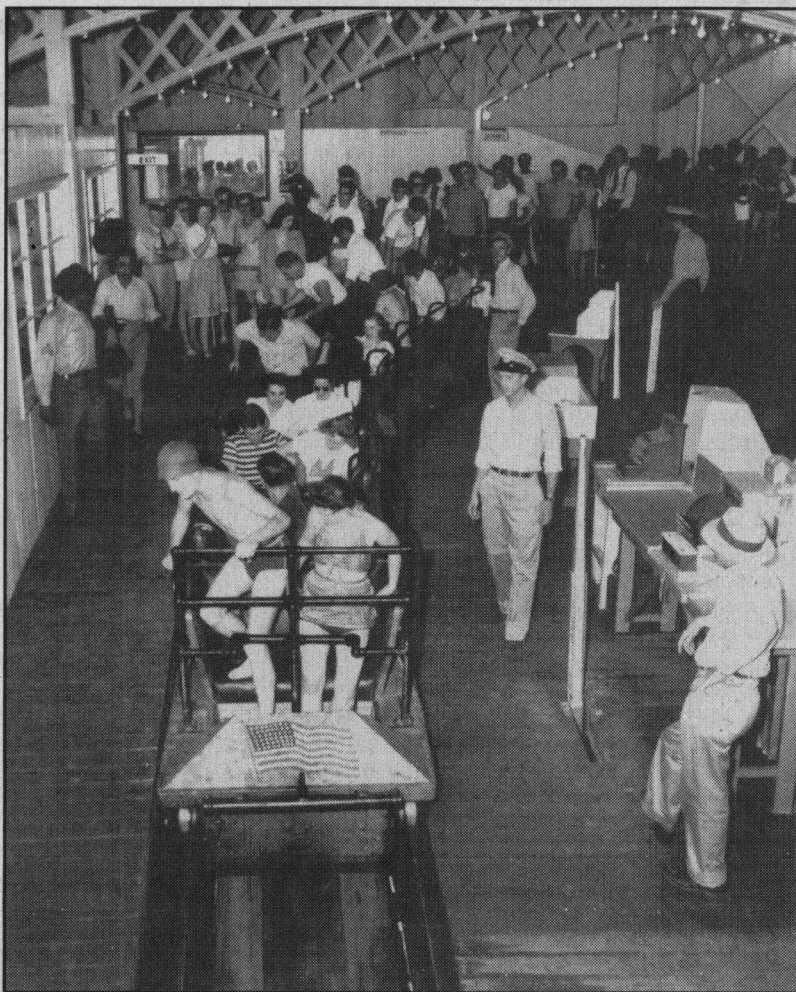
Loeff delivered the merry-go-round in 1911. It's a national landmark now, one of only six designed by Loeff still surviving in the United States.

Swanton's dreams were bigger than the bank accounts of his backers. His company went bankrupt, and the Santa Cruz Seaside Co. stepped in to buy the Boardwalk in 1915.

Loeff's son, Arthur, later convinced the Boardwalk to replace the Scenic Railway ride to make way for a "modern" wooden roller coaster — the Giant Dipper.

Back in 1924, when it first started clattering down the tracks, it cost 15 cents. Today, 44 million riders later, it costs \$3. The Giant Dipper is a national landmark, too, the oldest of the two large wooden scaffolded roller coasters remaining on the West Coast.

That same year, Miss California pageants moved onstage at the beach bandstand, while the audience gawked from their sand-side seats. (The first contest winner, Faye Lanphier, went on to become Miss America of 1925.) The pageantry continued until 1956, when



The Giant Dipper roller coaster in 1948.

it moved lock, stock and high heels.

Those were the days of all-day high school graduation parties, of internationally known water carnivals, of school kids performing acrobatic stunts from trapezes high above the pools and of Big Bands. Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Xavier Cugat and Lawrence Welk all had shows in the Coconut Grove ballroom.

Those, too, were the days of first kisses — thousands of teens came of age there. Some things never change.

Others do. In recent years the Boardwalk has changed by adding chowder cook-offs, summer concerts and high-tech attractions in order to compete against other amusement parks, shopping-center arcades, VCR movies and video games.

"We are in competition for the leisure dollar. We've got to be creative enough ... to capture the interest of people out there," said Charles Canfield, chairman of the Seaside Co. He is the second generation Canfield to run the Seaside Company, a private corporation with Canfield as the majority stockholder.

"We try to maintain our history — a melding of the old and the new," he added. "The key is having a nice blend of both."

Canfield also hopes the park can

expand, adding new rides and parking, as part of an ambitious city project to revitalize the Boardwalk area and eventually integrate it with Santa Cruz's downtown.

The plans, to be the subject of hearings this summer, highlight the importance of the park to the city. While the city boasts a beautiful setting, a downtown rebuilt since the Loma Prieta earthquake and a major university, it's probably the Boardwalk that comes to mind when most Californians think of Santa Cruz.

Canfield, meanwhile, says the

Boardwalk, squeezed on 12 skinny acres on pilings sunk in sand, needs room on "some good old dirt" for new rides. Someday he'd like to add a state-of-the-art steel coaster and a new water ride.

"The possibility of having more room just gives us options to do more, maybe move rides, add others," says Parker.

The city's initial plan calls for rerouting Third Street to improve traffic and give the Boardwalk room to expand. The La Bahia, an old apartment building the Santa Cruz Seaside Co. owns nearby, is expected to be replaced with a hotel and conference center. Planners want to incorporate at least the Spanish-style building's facade into the new building.

Plans also call for replacing part of Beach Flats, the city's worst slum and home to some of its poorest residents. Some of the land, owned by the Boardwalk, would be part of the park's expansion. Other parts could become new housing.

Beach Flats resident Phil Baer is among those who are wary, fearing that tall parking garages and expansion of the Boardwalk will further mar views of the San Lorenzo River where it flows into the Pacific next to the park.

"It's deserving of special protection, but I don't see it coming," he said.

But other residents and businesses on and near the Boardwalk like the changes being discussed. Merchants believe they will draw more people to the area in off seasons and encourage them to stay longer when they visit.

"I see the redevelopment as being almost a necessity. You can't expect to ... have everything stay the same," said Mathew Twisselman, who represents the third generation of his family to run food concessions at the Boardwalk and heads the Beach Area Business Association.

"In order to maintain something," he said, "you have to keep reinvesting in it."

Sentinel wire services contributed to this report.