

What's happened to amusement park food?

SANTA CRUZ — Holy corn dog. What's happened to amusement park food lately? Are snow cones really becoming a thing of the past?

Oh, relax. You can still get your basic hot dogs, hamburgers, corn dogs, and chocolate-dipped ice cream cones, but several newcomers have invaded the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk's cast of fast-food cuisine.

These food items now sharing the spotlight (or heatlamp if you will) with the old standards include gyros sandwiches, funnel cakes, fresh-baked ice cream cones, and shaved ice.

Art Shaw, the first new concessionaire on the Boardwalk in 12 years, features gyros sandwiches made with spicy beef served on hot pita bread, topped with tomato, onion, and a sour cream-cucumber sauce. And if this sounds Greek to you, that's because it is.

Shaw hopes the greek sandwich will become the next fast food craze.

"It's the hottest sandwich going," said Shaw, who makes his sour cream sauce fresh, and brings in his bread from Chicago, a town known for good pita bread.

A native New Yorker, Shaw moved to California when he was 10. After relocating, he remembers vacationing in Santa Cruz.

"We used to ride our horses down and spend time on the beach," Shaw recalled. "It's been my favorite place ever since."

The 53-year-old Shaw, along with his wife Catherine, own Shaw's Greek Sandwiches, which is not their first opportunity at being entrepreneurs. Shaw previously owned, operated and franchised Purity Water Works, with bottled water plants in California, Nevada and Arizona.

While the Shaws are the newest members of the Boardwalk's family of concessionaires, the Whiting family, which dates back to the early 1920s at the park, has been introducing several new food items during the last few years.

It was only a matter of time before somebody designed a better snow cone, and according to Ken Whiting's Food Concessions, the new Santa Cruz Sno', has rendered the standard snow cone obsolete.

It's called shaved ice, an innovative idea that has them lining up in Hawaii, and is now starting to catch on nationwide.

"The machine actually shaves the ice in front of the customer," said Whiting,



Becky Peterson makes a freshly-baked ice cream cone.

"making the ice lighter, airier and more like real snow than snow cones used to be."

Whiting, who got the idea from vendors in Hawaii, added that the flavors poured over the shaved ice are more modern and tropical now.

"We carry pina colada, mai tai, passion fruit, black raspberry, cherry and lime," said Whiting. "If we wanted to expand on those, we could serve root beer, strawberry, bubble gum, suicide (a combination of several flavors) and many others."

Preparing food items for the customer's viewing is a recent trend in the amusement park industry, which led to the introduction of several other types of food on the Boardwalk, including funnel cakes and fresh-baked cones.

Also featured by Whiting's funnel cakes are deep-fried pastries with powdered sugar, strawberry or raspberry topping.

"This is strictly an impulse item," said Whiting. "Not too many people know what a funnel cake is, so if we put it on a menu, nobody would order one. We need to make it in front of people, and make the show part of the package."

Although Whiting's fresh-baked cones won't replace the popular chocolate-dipped softies, they have developed a following partly because of how they're made.

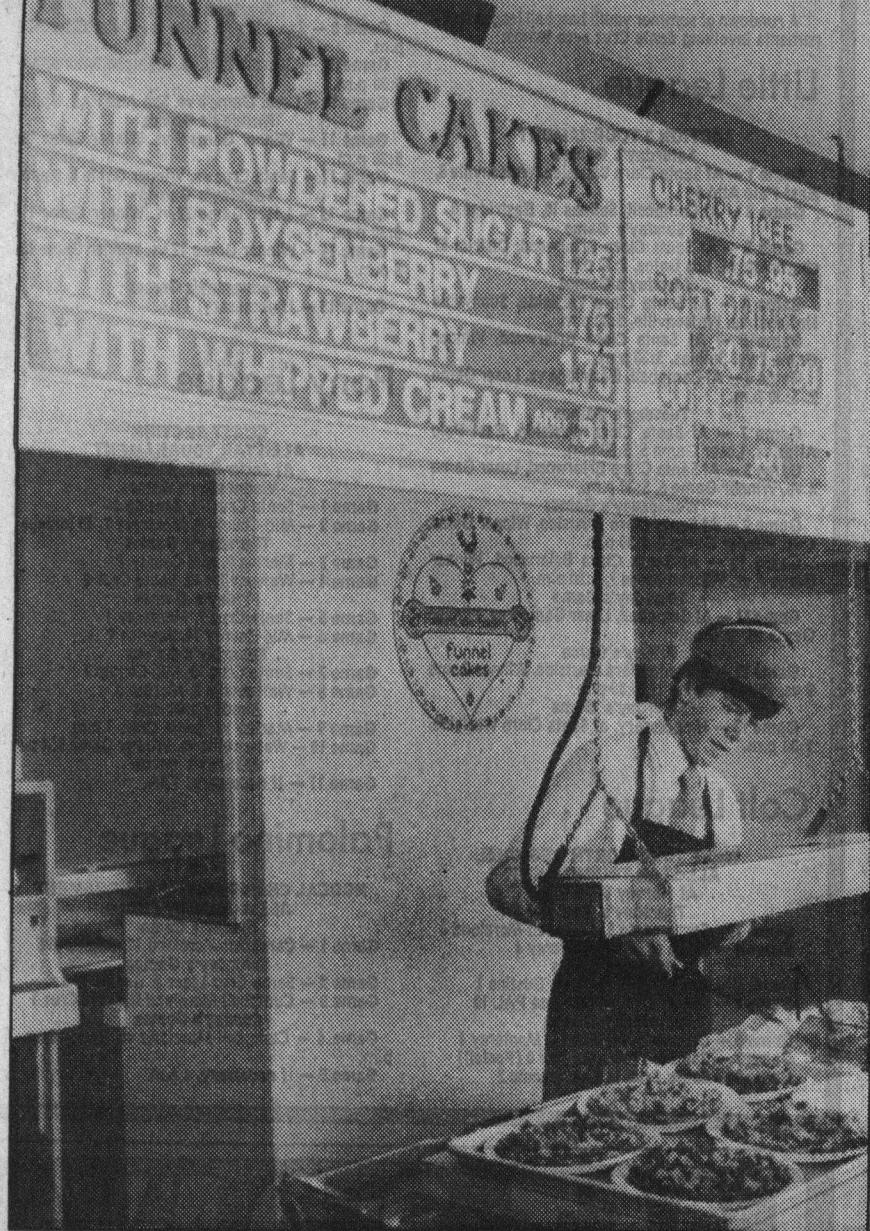
"It's entertaining for the customer to see each cone freshly made," said Ted Whiting, Jr., who found the idea three years while on vacation in Europe, but

could not introduce Boardwalk visitors to the concept until the cone-making equipment became available in the U.S.

The cones are made by dropping batter into a very shallow baking iron which simultaneously cooks both sides like a waffle iron.

Once out of the cooker, the product is rolled into shape with a wooden roller. Within 20 seconds, it hardens into a cone, which can be made into a double-scoop cone, or a walking hot fudge sundae with whipped cream, nuts and cherry.

While these new food items won't replace the good old hot dog, hamburger or chocolate-dipped cone, they have brought a new twist to a beach picnic at the Boardwalk.



Tasty delights at Boardwalk

ABOVE — Tim Rainey oversees the Funnel Cake Factory that features deep-fried pastries with powdered sugar, boysenberries, strawberries and whipped cream.

RIGHT — A variety of flavors are available at the new Santa Cruz Sno' concession. John Stroup serves up one of the tropical fruit flavors.

BELOW — Art Shaw and Julie Bolick prepare one of their gyros greek sandwich made of spicy beef served on hot pita bread.



Photos by Pete Amos

