



The "Kingfish" float won the President's Trophy during the 1989 Capitola Begonia Festival.

Photo by Robert Fishback

SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

Begonia Festival

If you were stuck in the desert, Capitola in September is exactly the kind of place you might wish you were. But since you're already here, you can enjoy Capitola By-the-Sea at its best during the 48th annual Capitola Begonia Festival beginning Sunday.

As you look forward to events from the wild creations of the sand sculpture contest to the begonia-bearing barges of the nautical parade, we look back at the glorious and inglorious Begonia Festivals of the past, through Carolyn Swift's book, "By-the-Sea: A History of the Capitola Begonia Festival."

## Queen of the festival:

In the infamous 1962 event, the title of queen went to the woman who had sold the most tickets to the event.

Or did she?

After she was honored at the banquet and her photo published in the newspaper, officials discovered that another woman had sold 200 tickets more than the queen.

What would you do?

Perhaps channeling King Solomon, the festival solved the conflict by declaring two queens for that year. They even smiled together in the official photo.

## The mayor who wasn't:

Before the festival got started officially, Capitola resembled a circus, minus the begonias:

When Capitola was trying to incorporate as a town in 1949, the man who won the most votes in the election for mayor, Brad Macdonald, was not named mayor.

Instead, the City Council chose Harlan Kessler to be the new town's first mayor.

# FLOATING

## down to Capitola on a river

# OF BEGONIAS

8-31-00

When voters protested, Macdonald was given the compensation prize: He'd be named mayor the next year (and he was).

## Whose begonias are they, anyway?

The first Begonia Festival was not held in Capitola. Where did it all begin?

In Santa Cruz in 1940 on Pacific Avenue. It was not an immediate success.

The second festival was actually held indoors. Why? World War II restricted the use of the town's waterways.

Capitola's version of the flowered festival began as the Water Fantasy, an aquatic carnival held on the lagoon, with begonias as a minor prop.

The official Capitola Begonia Festival began in 1954 with six floats towed through the lagoon by swimmers.

## Memorable moments:

Event highlights over the years:

■ The floating swimming pool float, pulled and pushed by kid swimmers in 1959.

■ The soap box derby down Monterey Avenue from Depot Hill, 1959.

■ The first-place float from the Capitola Fire Department: picturing in floral fashion a dog and a fire hydrant, 1960.

■ The floating martini float, Cocktails for Two, which won an award in 1962.

■ The outhouse float that took a first place in 1973.

■ The musical float contest of 1982, when "Going Down to Rio" took third, "Over the Rainbow" second and "Puff the Magic Dragon" first place.

But the grand sweepstakes was won by a begonia octopus, who waved a tentacle in time to the Beatles' song, "In the Octopus' Garden."

## Looking ahead:

Highlights for this year's Begonia Festival include:

■ Sand-sculpture contest: 8:30 a.m. to noon Sunday, on Capitola Beach.

■ Fishing derby: 6 a.m. to noon Monday, on the Capitola wharf.

■ Rowboat races: From 1 p.m. Monday, in Soquel Creek Lagoon. Boats provided.

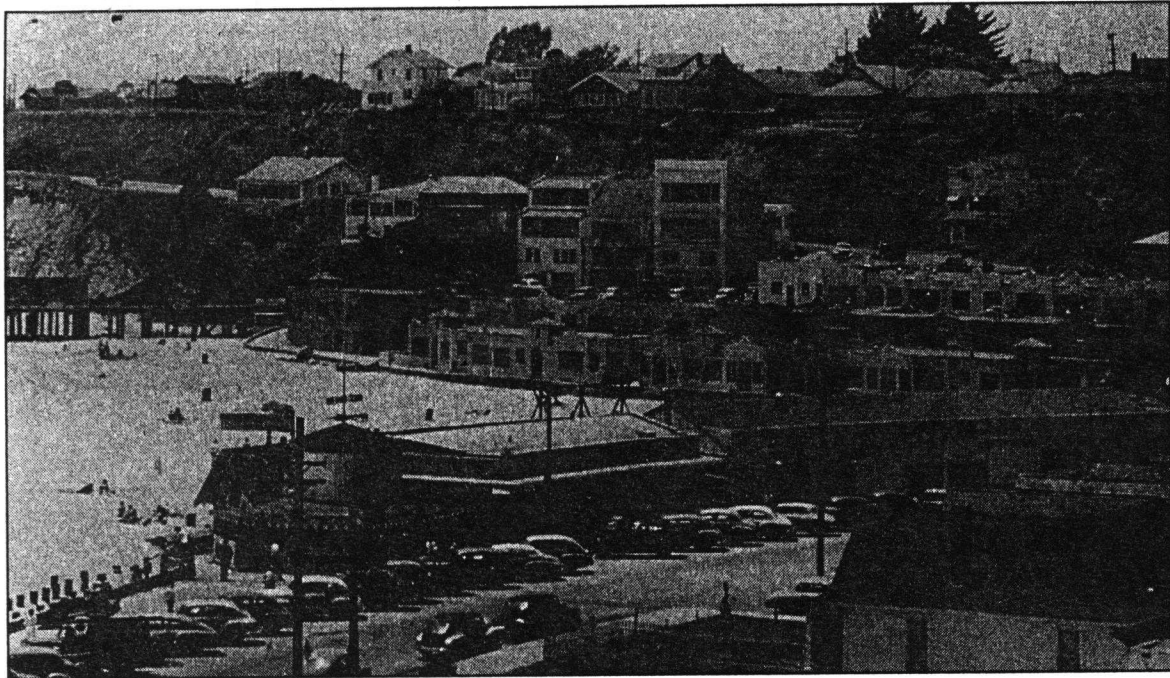
■ Chalk art: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, on the Esplanade. Chalk provided.

■ The big event is the nautical parade: Sunday, Sept. 10.

The begonia-covered barges, decorated in flowery fantasies, will be judged for prizes at 11 a.m.

Please see **BEGONIAS** on Page B2





# Begonias

Continued from Page B1

The Watsonville Marching Band plays at Esplanade Park from noon to 1 p.m.

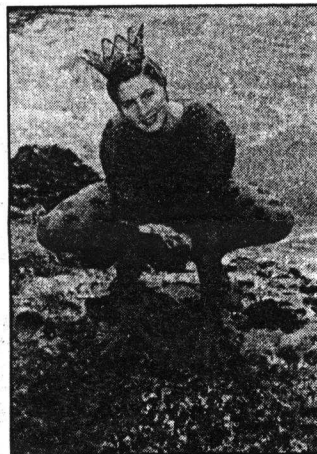
The parade itself starts at 1 p.m., as barges float from the creek to the lagoon.

If you want a preview of the barges, you can catch the madcap construction process from 4 to 10 p.m. on Saturday.

If you've been to the Begonia Festival before, you know you don't want to drive into Capitola on parade day.

Instead, take the free shuttle service from McGregor Drive, near the Park Avenue exit from Highway 1.

For more information, call the festival at 476-3566.



## VILLAGE LIFE:

In the top photo, Capitola as it looked around 1950.

**JUMPY:** At left is Donna Eral, modeling her attention-getting bull-frog outfit during the 1953 festival.