

KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Boats covered in thousands of begonias line up on Soquel Creek in Capitola on Sunday before the start of the 60th annual Capitola Begonia Festival Nautical Parade.

Floating on begonias

Begonia Festival

Nautical Parade's flowery boats draw crowd to Soquel Creek

By CATHY KELLY

ckelly@santacruzsentinel.com

CAPITOLA — Brightly colored begonia-covered boats drew a standing room-only crowd to the banks of Soquel Creek again this year for the 60th annual Capitola Begonia Festival Nautical Parade.

The crowd cheered the light-hearted, fanciful floats as they drifted down the river on a sunny afternoon. At least two carried musicians whose songs added to the fun. Celebrity appearances included "Elvis," who manned one float, and festival sponsor Ronald McDonald in a shiny white row boat.

ON THE NET

■ Watch designers construct the begonia-covered floats at www.santacruzsentinel.com.

Parties were held in several river-front yards and kayakers and others joined the floats on the water.

Longtime contestant Dan Finkel captured first place in the parade contest, along with Will and Caroline Miller, with a float titled "Capitola Water

Follies: Begonia Belle," in honor of the 1952 festival.

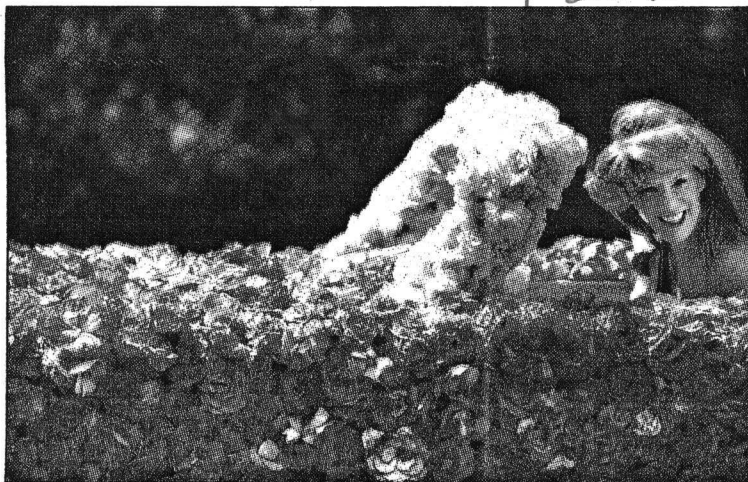
Finkel repeated a float his dad had made, of a historic paddle wheel boat, said Laurie Hill, parade chairwoman.

The parade theme was "My Favorite Year," and entrants were asked to pattern their float after a theme of a previous parade, Hill said.

She said history was quite possibly made by River-view Rascals, who claimed the tallest float ever with their "Hot Air Balloon" creation.

"It was a great sunny day for a parade," Hill said. "The trestle, bridge, creek path and lagoon were packed with spectators. I want to give thanks to all the float builders and volunteers who made this festival such a success."

Bill Gibson of Soquel was one of those spectators, along with his girlfriend, Dana Farquhar. He said he tries to make it down each year.



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

A parade participant in a 1950s Elvis-themed begonia boat floats down Soquel Creek toward Capitola Village Sunday during the 60th annual Nautical Parade.

AT A GLANCE

BEGONIA FESTIVAL NAUTICAL PARADE WINNERS

PARADE THEME: 'MY FAVORITE YEAR, A RETROSPECTIVE

FIRST PLACE: Dan Finkel, Will and Caroline Miller, Casa Finkel, with 'Capitola Water Follies: Begonia Belle,' (1952) to benefit Grind out Hunger

SECOND PLACE: Dennis Norton, Friends of the Windmill House, with 'Pink Cadillac,' (1959) to benefit Save Our Shores

THIRD PLACE: Michael Hanson, Gayle's Bakery & Rosticceria, with 'Alice in Wonderland Mad Hatter's Tea Party,' to benefit Native Animal Rescue

SPECIAL RECOGNITION CATEGORIES

MAYOR'S CHOICE: Paul Hammer, Begonias on the Bay, with 'Flights of Fancy' (1991)

MOST CLEVER UNDER-THE-BRIDGE DISPLAY: John and Marie Martorella, Riverview Rascals, with 'Capitola Takes Flight: Hot Air Balloon' (2009)

BEST HISTORICAL: Robin Ellis, St. John's Episcopal Church, 'Noah's Ark'

CAPITOLA SPIRIT: Randy Swanson, Night Train, 'Beach Party' (2010)

BEST FIRST-TIME FLOAT: Melissa Devera and Jade Atkins, GMO Santa Cruz, 'Days Gone By; Traditional Farming: The Way it Was' (1978)

PARADE

Continued from A1

"I think it's an awesome, special thing we do here," he said. "It's fun and I love that they shut down Stockton Avenue."

Becky Mikosz of San Jose said she has come to the festival for the past few years.

"I like the small-town feel of this; I think it's good for the village, people come from all over," she said.

Volunteers worked on floats until late Saturday night, a parade announcer said. She said making a float is a great team-building exercise.

The parade is limited to 10 barges, and the parade organizers supply the basic wooden platform. The bulbs are grown in Marina and donated by Golden State Bulb Growers Association.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, approximately 90 percent of the world's begonias came from the former Brown Bulb Ranch in the area where Capitola Mall now stands, according to the festival website.

The nautical parade has its roots with a local swim teacher, Peggy Matthews, who staged the Capitola Water Follies every fall to showcase her swimmers. Matthews noticed begonia flowers going to waste on a ranch, as growers were interested only in propagating bulbs.

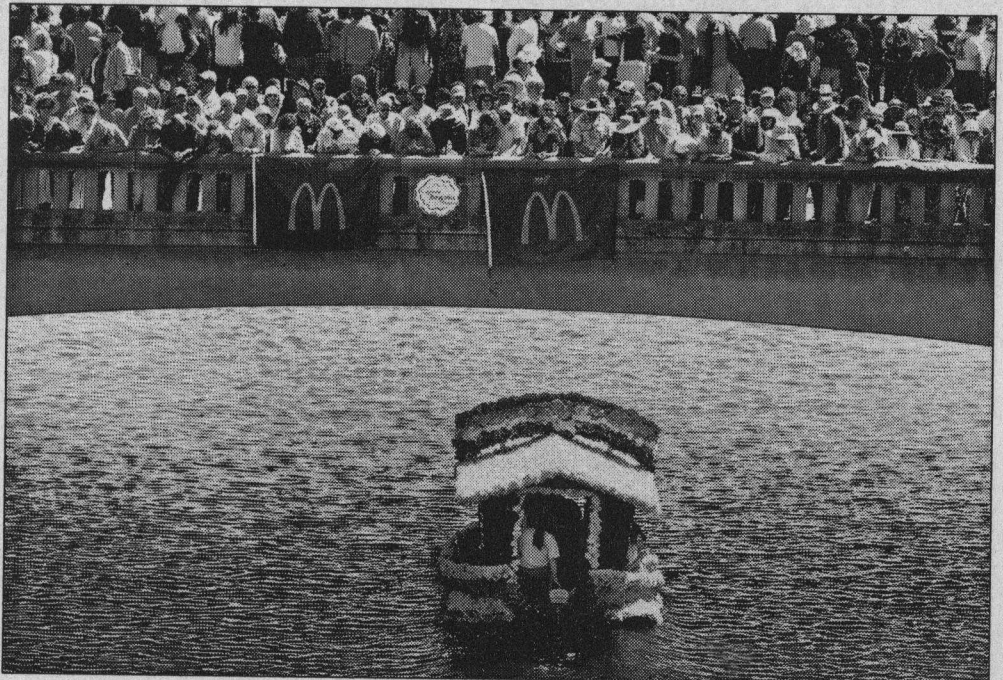
In 1951, Matthews was given permission to pick as many flowers as she wanted and that year's follies featured paddle boards decorated with begonias. The next year was the first year of actual "floats." Even though the real Capitola Begonia Festival was not official until 1954, organizers say they have always used 1952 as the starting date.

The all-volunteer festival continues today with a 6 a.m. fishing derby on the wharf, children's art and a "Hoops for Everyone" teaching and expo from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Esplanade Park, and row boat races at 1 p.m. along Soquel Creek.



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

A boat decorated with thousands of colorful begonias approaches the Stockton Bridge in Capitola Village on Sunday during the 60th annual Nautical Parade.



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

A Noah's Ark-themed boat covered in thousands of Begonias floats underneath the Stockton Bridge on Soquel Creek in Capitola on Sunday during the 60th annual Nautical Parade.

'I like the small-town feel of this; I think it's good for the village, people come from all over.'

BECKY MIKOSZ, San Jose resident