

# Sal's laffing again



**ABOVE:** Young Bella Manoff, in a red shirt, is mesmerized by a cackling Laffing Sal, after the historical greeter was unveiled at the Boardwalk on Friday. **BELOW:** Those attending the ceremony take a look at Sal's tattered, faded original clothes.

## Boardwalk revives historic greeter

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SANTA CRUZ — The Boardwalk's newest leading lady has arrived, and from the sounds of it, she's quite pleased with her new home.

Laffing Sal, a 6-foot-tall fun house mechanical lady, has begun welcoming guests from her glass display case on the seaward side of Neptune's Kingdom.

A crowd of about 50 people gathered Friday morning to watch her unveiling, which marked the start of the Boardwalk's 98th summer season.

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# Sal

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Isabella Garber brought her grandson, Devon, 4, to the event. "She has such a friendly-looking face," Garber said after Sal was revealed from behind a black curtain. "I was afraid she was going to be too big and too scary, but she's not."

She might not be scary, but Laffing Sal is no looker. Her auburn hair is untamed, her face is pock-marked with big freckles, and one of her front teeth is black.

But her laugh is endearing — a body-buckling, arm-waving guffaw, which might follow a great joke (or a bit too much to drink).

"The laugh was definitely right," said San Jose resident Karl Launcher as his 4-year-old granddaughter, Coxa, stood wide-eyed, watching Sal cackle and move.

"A couple of us old-timers remember her from San Francisco," he said. Their childhood memories were a little distorted, though. "We thought she had a bigger head," Laucher said with a smile.

Laffing Sal was a fixture of San Francisco's Playland-at-the-Beach until the amusement park was shuttered in 1972. Last year, Seaside Co. brought Sal out of retirement after buying her for \$50,000 at an estate auction.

She faces another new display, a tribute to the

eight seaside amusement parks that once dotted California's coast.

Santa Cruz Mayor Mike Rotkin proclaimed Friday "Laffing Sal Day" in tribute to her history and the history of the Boardwalk.

Before the unveiling, her famous cackle was digitally enhanced in a tune-up and makeover that also replaced her clothing, wig, and some mechanical parts.

"I remember the first time I saw her — she looked a mess," said Boardwalk employee Mark Hersey, who led the restoration of Sal's innards after her purchase.

"All the parts that connected her together were loose, sloppy. I had to replace a lot of stuff," he said.

As the inaugural ceremony, the crowds around Laffing Sal left, and the normal flow of traffic resumed. People passed Sal's display case, pausing only briefly.

"She has a good laugh," one middle-age lady told her friends.

For a short while, perhaps. Prolonged exposure, however, may be a little harder to bear.

"You just block it out," said Michael Ostrander, the security guard in charge of watching over Laffing Sal's original duds. "Believe me, after working at a place like this, you have selective hearing."

Laffing Sal just laughed. And laughed. And laughed.

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