

VCF BEGONIA FESTIVAL RP 9/4/87

A 'street gang' that relies on flower power

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

It's Begonia Festival time in Capitola and the 302 Cherry St. Gang is at it again.

On a secluded, fog-shrouded street in Aptos, gang members are busy pounding, snipping and sawing away on what they claim will be the best flower-bedecked float in the Nautical Parade.

Considering they've managed to create three prize-winners in three years of parade competition, they just could be right.

"Every year it seems to get a bit bigger and the animation gets better," said Toby Sutton, a leader of the gang along with brother, Joe, and friend, Mark Adamick.

This year's entry is "The Spirit of Captain Tola" and, according to the gang, he's a natural; he's the captain who introduced the begonia and then lent his name to Capitola-by-the-sea.

Joe Sutton said the gang searched long and hard for a float-entry idea under this year's theme of "mythology," and finally discovered a long-buried book of lost tales.

"It was an old, dusty book," Joe said. "It was in someone's sea chest."

In the book, allegedly written in approximately 9000 B.C., was "The Begonia Myth," otherwise called "The Legend of Captain Tola."

"Forseeing the fall of Atlantis, the wise flower goddess Begas summoned her most fearless sea captain, Tola, to make a long voyage to another land and disperse her most rare and unusual flower, the beautiful begonia, which actually cried tears of joy and brought happiness to all who saw it.

"And so Captain Tola and his trusty mate, the parrot Aptos, came upon a beautiful land with a gracious river and loving people. They appreciated the gift and named the land Capitola after the famous sea captain, whose spirit can still be seen bringing the treasure chest filled with begonias to the people."

After generations away from the magical aura of Atlantis, the begonia has slowly shrunk in size. But when Captain Tola returns Sept. 13 to Capitola by way of Soquel, Joe said he'll be bearing some of the original blooms. Each petal is equal to about 60 full-size begonias.

Since Captain Tola's clothing will be locally grown, however, 50 members of the 302 Cherry St. Gang must still troop south to the begonia fields near Marina to gather 18,000 to 20,000 flowers.

That's scheduled for 6 a.m. on the Saturday before the parade. The hardest job is likely to

be getting out of bed, since the gang traditionally stages a Friday night party starting at Margaritaville and ending at — where else? — 302 Cherry St.

The work will really begin when the flower-pickers return. By 12:30 p.m., a 100-member crew will be dressing "The Spirit of Captain Tola," begonia by begonia.

"It's an extreme amount of work," Toby said. "It's probably harder than any of us have ever worked in our lives, from Friday night on."

A couple hours of sleep a night is all the gang can expect to catch, he said. Yet the gang lives for the Nautical Parade.

"It's like a rite of passage every year around the Begonia Festival," Joe said.

It all began in 1984.

The Sutton brothers and Adamick, along with another friend, Jim Simms — new arrivals in town living at 302 Cherry St. — were sitting in Margaritaville drinking and chitchatting when they first heard talk of the Begonia Festival.

Perhaps it was the margaritas, but somehow the parade went to their heads and the 302 Cherry St. Gang was born.

Three girls in a cocktail glass was the gang's first idea for a float. Then they learned there was a theme and that 1984's was comic-strip characters. The gang's Garfield the Cat captured a second place that year.

The next theme was nursery rhymes and the gang's Mother Goose hit the big time with the grand sweepstakes award.

"I thought 'Goose' was real," said Toby's wife, Dianne. "I almost cried when they tore her down after the parade."

Last year, the gang did it again in the Alice in Wonderland theme parade — a grand sweepstakes for the Jabberwocky.

Simms has moved out of town now, but the rest of the gang's carrying on. The parade's become such a tradition that three couples, including Dianne and Toby Sutton, arranged their weddings around it last year, Dianne

said.

"You don't go on vacation during the Begonia Festival," she said. "You'd get lynched."

Members have grown from 20 that first year to about 150, though only 100 gang members will be down at the riverside dressing the Captain, the gang leaders said. It was just too crowded with the 125 helpers who turned up last year.

The parties are another story. Anyone purchasing a Toby-designed T-shirt or sweatshirt, which help defray expenses, is automatically

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— Gang member Toby Sutton

considered a gang member and is expected to help celebrate.

However, the location of Sunday's after-parade bash will remain a secret known only to gang members.

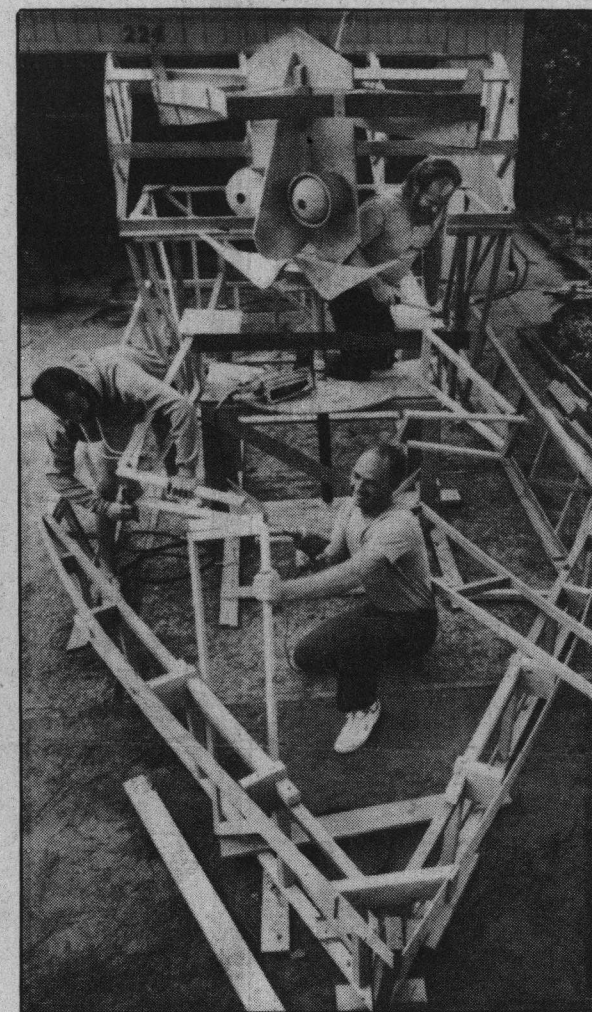
"We threw probably the biggest party Capitola's seen last year," Adamick said. "We threw a block party and it was crashed by just about half the people in Capitola."

Two kegs of beer were drained before the 302 Cherry St. Gang even got there, Toby said, so this year, it's gang members only.

With the Nautical Parade just days away, Captain Tola's shaping up and the gang's stocking up on sleep.

All except Adamick. He's still working on his annual task of finding a float queen.

It's a tough job, he said, but he's dedicated — he starts each year right after the festival and works on the problem right up until the next.



Chip Scheuer

Cherry Street Gang leaders, from left, Toby Sutton, Joe Sutton and Mark Adamick.

Sand sculpture kicks off festival Sunday

The 34th annual Capitola Begonia Festival gets off to its usual creative start Sunday with the Capitola Beach Sand Sculpture Contest.

Registration is open to sculptors of all ages and starts at 8:30 a.m. Judging is scheduled for 1:30 p.m., with trophies awarded to first, second and third place in several categories.

Then on Monday, anglers of all ages can try their luck from 6 a.m. to noon in the Fishing Derby off the Capitola Wharf. Fishing tales are welcome, but only the fish snag the prizes.

Then it's off to the Rowboat Races at 10

a.m. Monday. The pair in each age group fastest at rowing around the pylon course off the Capitola Wharf will win prizes and trophies.

The Home and Commercial Decorating contest is scheduled for judging at 11 a.m. Sept. 13, with prizes awarded to the best begonia-bedecked buildings.

Then at 2 p.m., it's time for the festival's grand finale — the Nautical Parade of begonia-covered floats down Soquel Creek.

It's not too late to enter, festival Chairwoman Phyllis Florek said, but you'd better hurry.

This year's theme is "Mythology." The 14

entrants are:

"Pele," Crawford-Golinos Family; "King Neptune," Green Earth Singles; "Medusa," Mervyn's Department Store; "Cupid," PG&E; "The Spirit of Captain Tola," 302 Cherry St. Gang; "Phoenix," Santa Cruz County Office of Education; "Legend of Pegasus," Monterey Bay Properties; "Davey Jones' Locker," No Line Down Team; "The Sphinx," Creatures of DeNile; "Unicorn," Bay Photo; "Jason's Argonauts," Capitola Fire Department; "Midas' Golden Touch," Orchard Supply Hardware; "Nectar of the God," Fay Cup; and "Mermaid," Webbers Camera.