

## A myth for high seas and creeks

9-10-87  
Begonia fest  
float builders  
stretch the  
imagination

By MARYBETH VARCADOS  
Living Section Editor

WHEN THE organizing committee of Capitola Begonia Festival announced "mythology" as this year's nautical parade theme, mental wheels began whirling among the 302 Cherry St. Gang. After a few rounds of icy margaritas, the high-spirited, inventive, prize-winning troupe decided to invent its own myth.

So avast ye mateys, at 2 p.m. Saturday during the annual Begonia Festival Nautical Parade, "Captain Tola" will set local history on its peg leg.

Sober as any landlubbers, Toby and Dianne Sutton and Toby's brother, Joe Sutton, recently related their "Begonia Myth," subtitled "The Legend of Captain Tola."

They gathered around the dining room table at Mark Primak's home in Rio del Mar. In the driveway, the wood skeleton of their float was taking shape.

The legend, they claim, was found in the bottom of a weather-worn captain's trunk during excavation for Capitola's new parking lot. Expressing mock amazement that edges of the copy machine paper are not brown with age, they shared their myth. And so, we share it, verbatim:

*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, that actually cried tears of joy and brought happiness to all who saw them.*

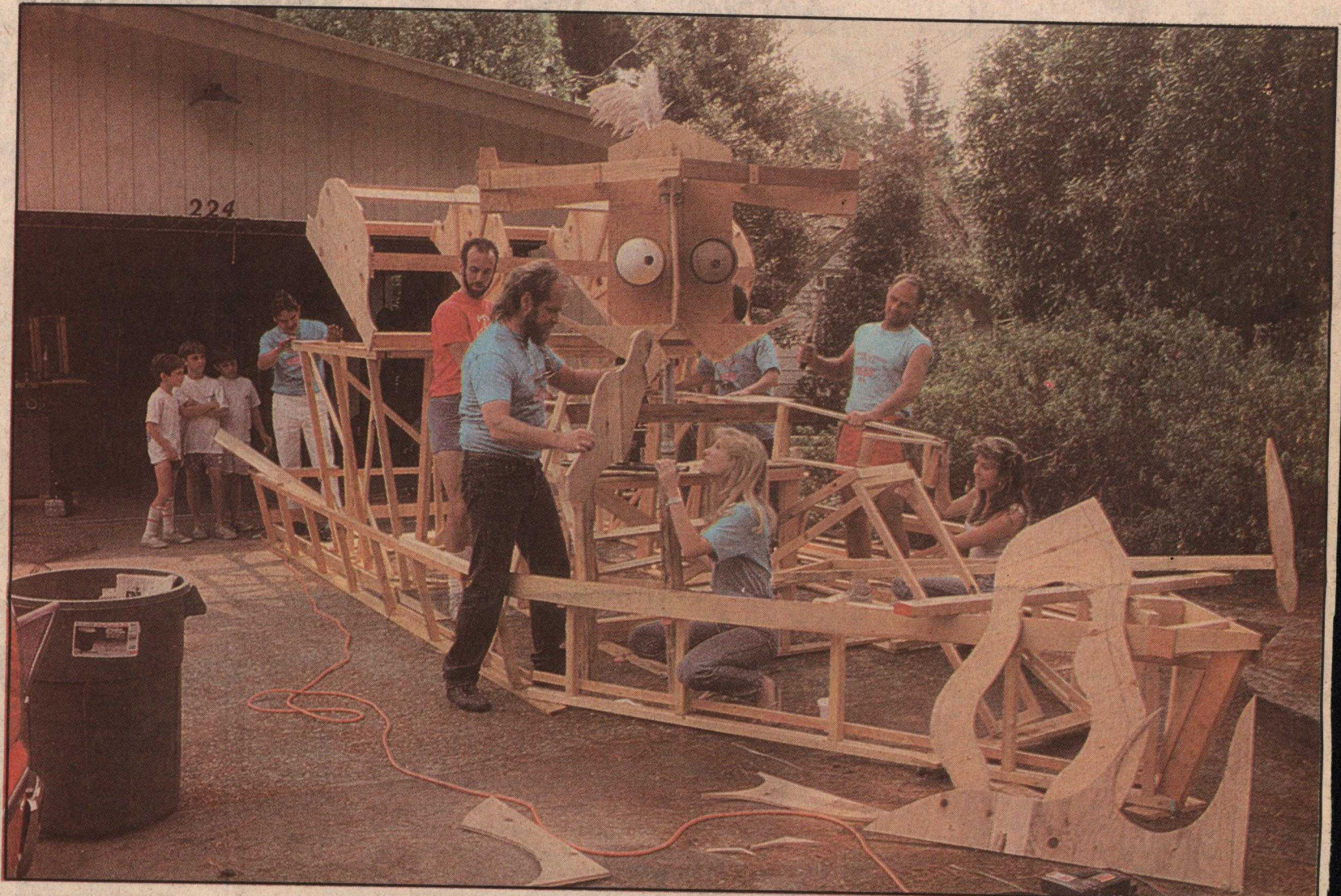
*... and so "Captain Tola" and his trusty mate, the parrot "Aptos" came upon a beautiful land with a gracious river and loving people. They appreciated the gift and named the land "Capitola" after the famous sea captain, whose spirit can still be seen bringing the treasure chest filled with begonias to the people. (Written approx. 9000 B.C.)*

THE 302 Cherry St. Gang came about some three years ago when Toby Sutton, a commercial artist who has a fiberglass repair business and also drives a wheelchair-accessible schoolbus, moved to the Capitola flats address from Placerville. Then came his brother, Joe Sutton, a waiter at a classy Santa Cruz restaurant. Then came Primak, a builder-contractor.

The three roommates were sipping margaritas at a Soquel Creekside watering hole when they heard about the nautical parade and decided to build a float depicting a giant margarita glass with girls jumping out. That year, though, the required theme was cartoon characters. So they settled on Garfield.

Their enthusiasm attracted friends from far and near and they became known as the 302 Cherry St. Gang, even though Joe's the only one still residing at the address.

The "gang" has swept away top Begonia Nautical Parade trophies for the last two years. (In earlier



Formative 'Captain Tola' Begonia Festival float gazes over crew from 302 Cherry St. Gang.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

**'Captain Tola' and his trusty mate, the parrot 'Aptos,' came upon a beautiful land with a gracious river and loving people.**  
— 'Ancient' myth

years, when the now-defunct Depot Hill Gang had its grip every year on the sweepstakes prize, the top awards were cash.) Float personas, claim the creators, take on almost human personalities. First, in 1984, came an appropriately buggy-eyed Garfield; next, a fussy, flapping Mother Goose; and, last year, the fire-breathing Jabberwocky from "Alice in Wonderland."

Following tradition, all entries float, pushed and sometimes are propelled by small motors, down Soquel Creek on 8-foot by 12-foot barges. Stretching tradition, the 302 Cherry St. Gang is extending Captain Tola three feet longer in the rear and seven feet in the front, with extra flotation for smooth sailing. The captain will have buggy eyes, just like Garfield and Mother Goose. The effect, according to Toby Sutton, comes from setting volleyballs into pressed paper flower pots.

Last September, their Jabberwocky "dazzled" the audience by breathing a 15-foot ball of flame (propane ignited with spark plugs) and snorting smoke (from a bottle of carbon dioxide in its nose) and moving its neck through the miracle of robotics. Riding the high gained from audience shouts and applause, the 302 Cherry St.-ers promise special effects that are "spectacular ... extravagant," said Tony Sutton.

"It will bring sighs and smiles to both children and adults," added Joe Sutton, whose parade job is to don a frogman suit, jump in the briny and guide the float through the water. Although he's never had qualms about the purity of Soquel Creek, with heavy algae growth this year he's determined, "not to swallow any, but I'm not too worried."

Another concern is the competition. "We have our own defense and offense system on spying," said Tony Sutton. It includes walkie-talkies, video cameras and vigilance through the wee hours Saturday night when begonias and people line the creekside, readying for the morrow.

If it sounds like all this costs money, that's true. The float alone, says Tony Sutton, demands a budget of about \$4,000. Last year, the Jabberwocky venture cost about \$5,000. So the "gang," now numbering about 125 of mostly adults, has developed a seed money scheme — everyone who paid \$25 received a T-shirt and was entitled to work on the float all parade weekend, with food provided. Sweatshirts and T-shirts also are sold, at \$20 or so. In financial squeezes, various "gang" members simply have loaned money, not expecting to be repaid.

Then, there's the "Full Moon in June" event. One member of the 302 Cherry St. Gang, Jim Simms, owns acreage in the Sierra foothills and has developed a campground, just for them. "It's like a big pep rally. As they leave, there's a big banner," said Dianne Sutton. It reads, "Are you ready for the Begonia Festival?"

And they all shout, "Yes," added her husband, "because that's the team spirit." And "Team Spirit" is the theme for 302 Cherry St.-ers, in this, the year of Captain Tola, and other stories which may reach mythological proportions.

## Begonia Festival events

FLOWERS, flowers and more flowers — an estimated 150,000 of them — will take center stage Sunday as the 34th annual Capitola Begonia Festival hits high gear.

Fifteen begonia-covered floats, each with an estimated 10,000 colorful tuberous begonias as adornment, will float down Soquel Creek in downtown Capitola beginning at 2 p.m. Sunday. The Nautical Parade, the premiere Begonia Festival event, is expected to draw upward of 10,000 spectators, who will line the banks and climb to rooftops for better views.

Homeowners and merchants will get into the act Sunday, participating in the Home and Commercial Decorating Contest. Prizes will be awarded to the best exteriors decorated with begonias.

Also on Sunday, the Northern California Men's Beach Volleyball Championships will conclude. Competition gets under way at 9:15 a.m. Saturday on Capitola Beach. Finals are scheduled for around 3 p.m. Sunday, right after the Nautical Parade.

As always, parking anywhere in Capitola Village is expected to be scarce. Visitors will get a break both Saturday and Sunday, however, as Capitola Police won't strictly enforce the public parking prohibition in neighborhoods. Neighborhood parking permit signs will not be covered.

Police Chief Don Braunton says parking meters will be in operation, as will the two-hour time limit on on-street parking spaces downtown.

Unrestricted time-limit parking will be available in the city's new 232-space parking lot. It is located behind City Hall and is

accessible from both Capitola and Monterey avenues.

The city's free beach shuttle bus at Park Avenue and McGregor Drive, adjacent Highway 1, will operate. Buses will shuttle visitors at 10-minute intervals. That lot probably will be full by noon Sunday.

Float-builders will be working on their masterpieces beginning Saturday along the Soquel Creek pathway. Work traditionally lasts well into the night, with finishing touches being applied right up to parade time.

This year's floats will follow the festival's "mythology" theme.

Group division entrants and their themes include:  
Santa Cruz Office of Education — The Phoenix.

The Crawford's, Golino's and Friends — Pele the Hawaiian God.

Green Earth Singles — Poseidon.

Capitola Fire Department — Jason and the Argonauts.

No Line Down Team — Davey Jones' Locker.

Creatures of the Nile — The Spinx.

The 302 Cherry Street Gang — Captain Tola.

Jo Jo's Kids — Cyclops.

Faye Cupp and Friends — Nectar of the God.

Commerical division entrants will be:

Monterey Bay Properties — Legend of the Pegasus.

PG&E — Cupid.

Orchard Supply Hardware — Midas's Golden Touch.

Mervyn's — Medusa.

Bay Photo Lab — The Unicorn.

Webber's Camera — The Mermaid.