

BEGONIA FESTIVAL

# FESTOONED FLOTILLA



Begonia-bedecked floats drift down Soquel Creek toward Capitola Village during Sunday's annual Begonia Festival nautical parade. Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

## Thousands of visitors roll into Capitola for Begonia Fest's annual nautical parade

By ALIA WILSON

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CAPITOLA — Keeping the crowd's energy pumping with the rowdiness of a college frat party, the Cal Poly Alumni Association kicked off the 56th annual Begonia Festival's Nautical Parade on Sunday morning with an ode to the Fab Four.

The group bobbed down Soquel Creek in a begonia-covered Yellow Submarine, marking the start of what has become a Labor Day weekend tradition in Capitola.

The Cal Poly graduates later thought they scored the top prize with their Beatles-themed cre-



The Yellow Submarine team celebrates after being named the parade's grand prize winner; it was quickly announced there had been a mistake. The Riverview Rascals were the actual winners.

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**'They pack the float with flowers, with fantastic ingenuity.'**

PARADE JUDGE KATHY KELLY ON THE WINNING TEAM, RIVERVIEW RASCALS





Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Spectators crowd Stockton Bridge, foreground, and Capitola Beach, rear, to watch begonia floats at the Begonia Festival's annual nautical parade Sunday.

## Festival

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ation, with one member diving into the creek when the news was announced. Unfortunately, the announcement was premature, and the group was still happy with its fourth-place finish.

"You know what, this event is just such a great ... opportunity to bring back the spirit of college," said Derek Marin, a 2003 Cal Poly graduate and captain of the Yellow Submarine.

That for-the-fun-of-it spirit pervaded the event.

"I really just love seeing people with begonias on their foreheads," said Dan Finkel, who helped create the second-place float, Phil the Kraken.

The festivities brought thousands of visitors to Capitola Village. Festival President Linda Banks said every year the event seems to get better and better, as more people return from all over the Monterey Bay Area to see the floats.

The festival also saw its effort to get more floats pay off. Festival organizers for the first time this year provided grants to help groups cover the costs of their blossom-bedecked creations. There were eight floats this year; past years have seen as few as four.

Stockton Bridge, Cliff Avenue and Wharf Road were elbow-room only; organizers and police said there were too many spectators to count. People's feet dangled off of Stockton Bridge to get a closer glimpse, while others sat on friends' shoulders to soak up the view.

The festival was launched in 1952 when Peggy Matthews, a local swim instructor, noticed that Brown's Bulb Ranch — approximately 90 percent of the world's begonias were grown at the Capitola ranch in the 1950s — was letting its begonias die in the field because it was actually the bulbs the grower wanted, not the blossoms. She got permission to pick the flowers, which she incorporated into her Water Follies event.

The blossoms today are donated by Golden State Bulb Growers, a Moss Landing-based operation that currently sells more begonias than any other grower

## Parade and Horseshoes winners

**GRAND PRIZE:** The Riverview Rascals won with Turtle from the Capitola Lagoon. Each entrant chooses a charity to donate any prize money. The Rascals' \$500 purse is heading to the Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

**HORSESHOES CONTEST:** The team of Mike Chavez and David Dagnino Jr. won the festival's Horseshoes on the Sand contest.

## If You Go

**FISHING DERBY:** 6 a.m. to noon at Capitola Wharf. Fishing poles not provided. Final tally will be at 11 a.m.

**ROWBOAT RACES:** 1 p.m. Boats provided. Registration will be at the path by the Stockton Bridge in Capitola at noon.

in the world.

Encouraging the love of the flower Sunday was resident Linda Hanson, who had a begonia photo opportunity set up in her backyard along the creek. Visitors lined up behind a cardboard cutout of a begonia-decorated couple.

"We have always embraced the festival," Hanson said. "We like to get into the spirit of things, and our photo op has been very popular. We don't try to compete with the visitors, which makes the experience a lot more fun."

Other festival activities included Saturday's sand castle sculpting contest and Sunday horseshoe tournament. The Fishing Derby and Rowboat Races are set for today.

Winning the grand prize two years in a row, the Martorella, Proctor and Westman families — known as the Riverview Rascals — created the Turtle from the Capitola Lagoon. It came replete with a moving turtle head that nodded to spectators.

"It's just no wonder they won," said Kathy Kelly, judge and festival vice president. "They pack the float with flowers, with fantastic ingenuity."

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