



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

One of the highlights of the Begonia Festival is the nautical parade, when floats and boaters drift down Soquel Creek.

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# flower **POWER**

Begonia Festival marks 50th year with format changes

By **WALLACE BAINE**

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**T**he famed Capitola Begonia Festival begins its second half-century with a new format that should please out-of-town visitors. In its 50th year, the Begonia Festival has gone from a two-weekend event to a one-weekend event without losing any of its activities or popular attractions.

This year, the festival will take place over three days: Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Festival spokesman Chuck Anderson said the thinking behind the original two-weekend format was to extend the tourist season beyond Labor Day weekend.

But in recent years, the Capitola Art & Wine Festival in mid-September has fulfilled that function.

"Plus, a single-weekend festival makes it easier for visitors coming from out of town," Anderson said.

Yet all the familiar touchstones of the beloved Capitola event are there: the rowboat races, the sand sculpture contest and, of course, the parade of begonia-bedecked floats down Soquel Creek to the lagoon near Capitola

Beach.

Festival organizers are expecting 5,000 visitors for the annual event, including about a dozen very special guests.

In honor of the 50th anniversary, Begonia Festival board members made the effort to track down women who have been named Begonia Festival Queen over the years. The last Begonia Festival queen was crowned in 1974.

"We even found one lady who was queen from one of the predecessor events that took place before the Begonia Festival," Anderson said.

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## Begonia

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Things get started early Saturday morning down at Capitola Beach with the Sand Sculpture Contest. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. — you're welcome to come anytime before then to get started — and continues until noon, at which time judging will take place.

You can spend the afternoon checking out the various sand sculptures or following the walkway alongside Soquel Creek to see the festival's most famous icons, those beautiful Begonia floats, being assembled. Float building continues until 10 p.m.

On Sunday, after a leisurely brunch, wander down to Soquel Creek to find a suitable viewing place. The float parade begins at 1 p.m. and this year features eight floats, sponsored by local businesses and organizations.

The festival supplies the float makers with a bare barge and two instructions: The float must fit under the Stockton Avenue bridge on the creek, and it must be covered from top to waterline with begonia blossoms.

The parade's master of ceremonies will be historian Sandy Lydon.

This year's theme is "Golden Myths and Fairy Tales." Registered floats will be using such themes as "Mad Hat-ter 2002," "Rapunzel" and "The Lost City of Atlantis."

Once the parade is over, the floats will be parked in the lagoon for closer viewing.

On Monday, the start is especially early, 6 a.m. to be exact. That's when registration begins for the Fishing Derby, the opening event in a day devoted to kids.

The Derby takes place at the Capitola Wharf, and the final tally is taken at 11 a.m.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The best vantage point from which to view the nautical parade is often the water.

For those who aren't exactly morning people, there are the popular Rowboat Races, that begin at 1 p.m. If you want to participate, registration is free and takes place from noon to 1 p.m.

Festival promoters strongly suggest that visitors use the Capitola Beach shuttle, which rotates every 20 minutes between Capitola Village and its parking area near the Park Avenue exit of Highway 1.

For more information on the 50th annual Capitola Begonia Festival, log on to [www.begoniafestival.com](http://www.begoniafestival.com).

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