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Boardwalk
Boardwalk has tons of memorabilia

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — Micki Ryan is a woman with a past. A very long past.

In fact, it goes back to before the turn of the century and is filled with bathing beauties, carnival rides and dance bands.

Ryan is the archivist for the Seaside Co., which runs the historic Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Ryan came to the temporary job in late 1988 with the expectation she would have to catalog 3,000 to 4,000 items collected by the company from as far back as the late 1880s.

"But when I started investigating, the numbers just exploded," said Ryan, a Santa Cruz resident who also has worked with the San Jose Historical Museum.

Ryan estimated that she has unearthed more than 21,000 items, ranging from a rotary valve flugel horn used by a member of the Santa Cruz Hastings Band at the Boardwalk to hand-painted Coconut Grove posters found gathering dust and cobwebs behind the stage.

The Mother Lode of Boardwalk memorabilia was in Skip Littlefield's old office, said Ryan. Littlefield, who started with the company as a lifeguard, died in 1985 after serving as marketing director and, finally, historian.

"It was only a six by 12 (foot) office, but every single shelf was packed," said Ryan. "It was difficult for people who wanted to use the system because it was his own personal file."

So company officials brought in Ryan, who began the job by inventorying the massive collection in Littlefield's office, in addition to the historical treasures unearthed elsewhere on the Boardwalk.

"There was some little stash in every office here," said Ryan. "The thing that amazed me was the number of related items on a given subject."

For instance, that flugel horn from the Hastings Band now is part of a collection from that group cataloged in the Boardwalk archive that includes sheet music, an old photo, newspaper clippings and a replica of the band's big drum.

Ryan carefully went about organizing these and other things — like posters, audio tapes, movie reels, newspaper clippings by the thousands, photographs, dissolving negatives, antique bathing suits, ancient arcade games, blueprints of such things as the original Neptune's Casino and even original documents and stock offerings



Micki Ryan is in charge of close to 21,000 items at the Boardwalk. Here she holds a Hastings' Band drum. Note the flugel horn at left.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

from the Santa Cruz Beach Co., which was purchased by the Seaside Co. in 1915.

"The original idea was to find ways to make things last," said Ryan, who has used special envelopes for old negatives and precious photos and documents.

She now keeps careful track of the temperature and relative humidity in the company archive room in order to maintain the collection.

Ryan is about halfway through the second phase of her three-prong plan to finish the archive: she has designed a computerized catalog system that is easily available to company employees who need to tap into the history.

"There are only a handful of companies in the whole United States that have gone through the trouble of saving this information," said Ryan, including such giants as Coca-Cola and Kraft. "And here's this relatively small company in Santa Cruz that uses the

same standards in taking care of their history."

Ryan said the third stage of her project will be training employees to use the system so it will always be maintained professionally.

"Every single day you learn something new," said Ryan. "It's such a kick."

For instance, did you know, said Ryan, that in 1904 there was a Santa Cruz ordinance that prohibited men from appearing on the beach without a hat and coat? And women, of course, had to have their legs covered.

Did you know that in the 1920s the chief of police was down on the beach arresting men who had swimming trunks on without their jersey tank tops?

Did you know that in 1946, the pier that ran out from the old plunge building was renamed the United Nations Pier and a flag from every country flew along it? Ryan still has all the flags.

It's not just flags the Boardwalk

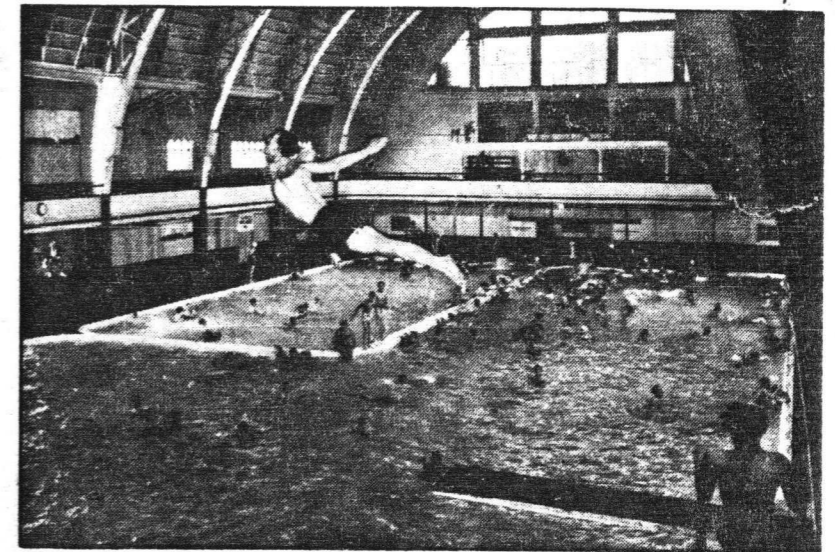
has saved, but also such things as a copy of every change in stationary letterhead.

"I think it shows a commitment to the community and a commitment to history that you don't see that often," said Ryan. "This company has taken the initiative on its own (to) recognize the importance of its past."

Part of the Boardwalk's past now is making the rounds of California museums in a two-room exhibit called "Never a Dull Moment."

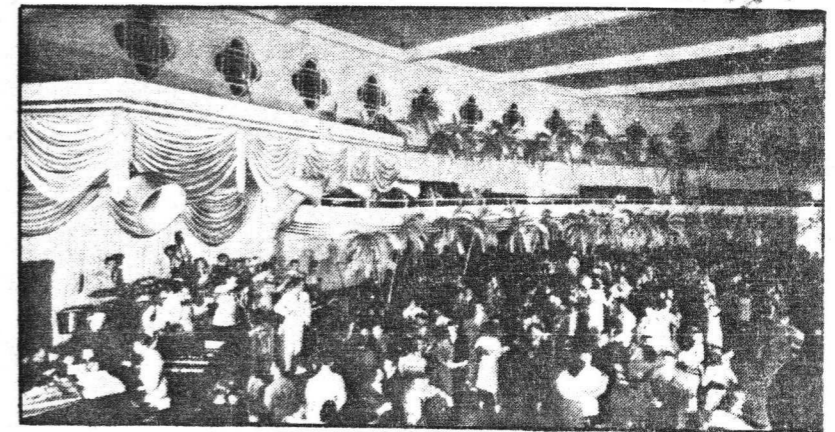
It will open at the Metropolitan Museum in Fresno in March, and then will be at the San Diego Historical Museum. When it appeared at the Santa Cruz museum and in Oakland, said Ryan, curators said it was one of their most popular exhibits ever.

"It strikes a chord with everyone who sees it because everyone has been to the Boardwalk," said Ann Parker, publicity manager for the Seaside Co. "The word is out that it's a fun and historically accurate exhibit."

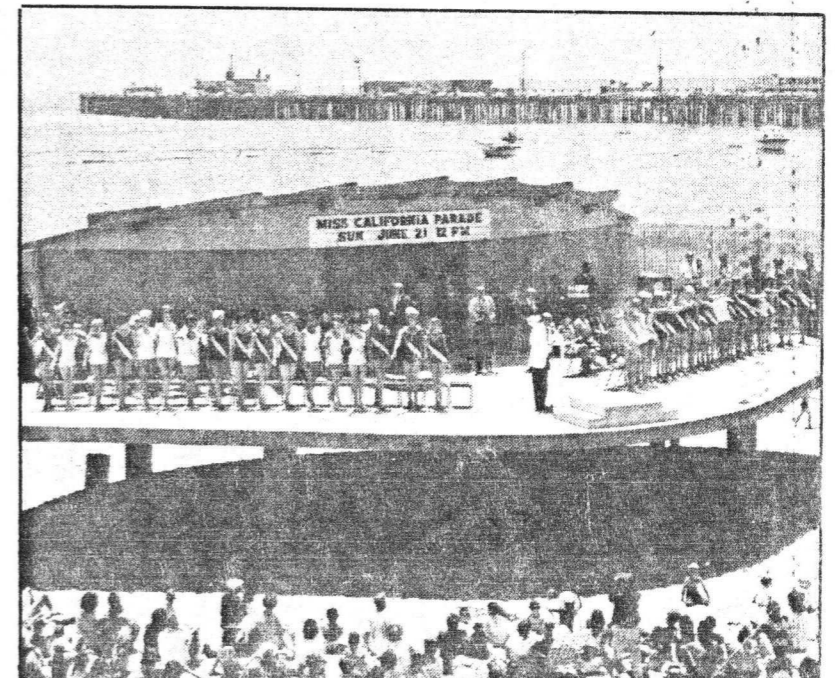


Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk archives photos

The Santa Cruz plunge in 1946.



The Coconut Grove ballroom hosted many big bands. This was the scene in 1937.



The Beach Bandstand was the scene of the 1964 Miss California Pageant.