



People line Capitola's river banks and bridges for the nautical parade. Check the weekend's events on page B3. Dan Coyro/Sentine file photos

# Blooming Begonias

ORGANIZERS HOPE TO MAKE EVENT A PERENNIAL FAVORITE

*Begonia Festival*

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Seven former Begonia queens were on deck for the 2003 parade.

By **SORAYA GUTIERREZ**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

**W**hen the Begonia Festival celebrated its 50th year in 2002, organizers were struggling to keep the traditional event alive for future generations.

Since then, the festival committee has been working to keep one of Capitola's original festivals from disappearing. Starting on Saturday, the show will go on, this time with some fresh ideas.

"We plan on being here another 53 years," said Eddie Ray Garcia, who heads the festival committee.

Thanks to widespread community support for the city festival, volunteers of all

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## Begonia

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ages are doing their part to save the festival.

One strategy was to condense the festival into one weekend instead of splitting the events over two consecutive weekends.

"As a committee, we were too stretched out and too stressed out," Garcia said.

Labor Day weekend was selected as the ideal time to host the festival because the extended holiday would allow more time to squeeze in all the events.

"People kind of wrote us off for gone, but we came together as a committee and said, 'We're not ready to give up yet,'" Garcia said.

New events planned this year include community beach volleyball, two concerts in the park and begonia hat decorating.

Now, the volunteers are working out the final details to make this year's event a success, ensuring its return next year.

"It's crunch time," Garcia said, admitting he's feeling tired.

The three-day festival is put on by a team of 20 volunteers. In addition, it has enjoyed the support of the city and local businesses.

"If we didn't have our sponsors, we wouldn't exist," Garcia says.

The cost to put on the festival is nearly \$30,000. The city this year contributed \$5,000, and the rest comes from fundraising.

The budget covers "the nuts and bolts of putting on the festival," Garcia says, including insurance and cleanup costs, award and trophy expenses, porta potties, repairing the barges for the parade, materials like wire, posters and ribbon, the sound system and putting on the fundraisers.

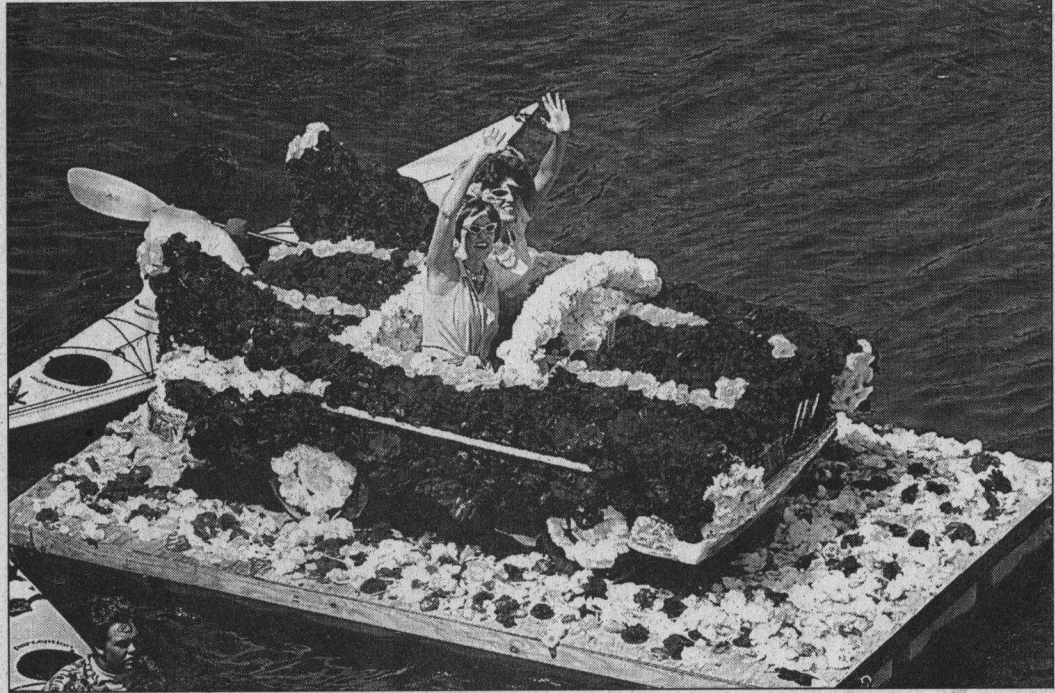
The begonias are donated by Golden State Bulb Growers. Teams of volunteers help themselves to the flowers at the company's ranch in Marina the day before the festival, said Andy Snow, a begonia breeder.

"We do it as a public service," he said.

The company, formerly Brown Bulb Ranch in Capitola, grows and sells millions of bulbs but has no use for the flowers, so it's a win-win for both parties.

Partnerships like these make the festival a favorable situation for everybody involved, Garcia says.

Soquel High senior Max Crain also contributed to the festival to help him earn an Eagle Scout ranking.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

The Begonia Festival celebrated the '50s in this high-finned car float from 2003.

Max, 17, built four barges to be used as flotation devices for the nautical parade. His work was part of a community service project that required 100 hours of volunteer time.

Max asked his family for donations to help fund his project. He received a total of \$1,200 for materials.

When he was done, he had \$850 left over, money that will be donated back to the parade committee.

The barges are ready to hold the creations of the float decorators.

"I'm happy that it's finally done," Max said.

The behind-the-scenes work is wrapping up, and the volunteers will see their work come to life this weekend before thousands of spectators.

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