

77 years of ups and downs working on the Boardwalk

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John Evers, Dick Ryder and Bill Fravel are no strangers to the Santa Cruz Beach and Boardwalk.

Evers rode the roller coaster there every day for 18 years. Everyone said the Seaside company would go out of business when the cost to ride the Giant Dipper went up to 35-cents many years ago, said Evers.

It didn't, of course, and the three men stayed at their jobs of building, rebuilding and repairing the rides. And now it costs a buck to ride the Dipper.

All told, the three men have chalked up 77 years' worth of experience in the operations of the Boardwalk.

Ryder remembers the days when he helped tear down the old beach bandstand and worked building the Wild Mouse ride.

Fravel recalls when the kiddie rides and the merry-go-round cost only 12-cents. "I remember handling all those damn pennies," he said with a grin. Today's cost for a ticket on those rides is 50-cents. In the old days, you didn't even need a ticket first to get on a ride. Just money.

How times have changed since the three men first started their jobs on the Boardwalk maintenance crew over 20 years ago.

The roller coaster and merry-go-round are the only original rides left at the beachfront amusement park, said Fravel. And both rides have been rebuilt.

The three men were at the Boardwalk Friday — not inspecting and adjusting the mechanical works of the rides as usual — but pouring over old newspaper clippings and yellowed photographs, while reminiscing about the old days.

They are retiring from their jobs in the Seaside Company's operations department.

Fravel, 60 years old today, will leave his post as maintenance supervisor after a 29-year stay with the amusement company.

Working there has been "like having 27 erector sets to play with," said Fravel, of Capitola. He started out in the early Fifties as a kiddie ride operator and has worked on every ride there.

In 1955, Ryder followed in his father's footsteps as a night watchman for the Boardwalk. Later, he worked for the maintenance division and now retires from his post as operations manager.

Ryder, 56, of Santa Cruz, will still be working at the Boardwalk after his retirement, however. He will run the photo booth where customers dress in old timey garb and have their pictures snapped. He will also operate the souvenir snapshot and computer image concessions.

Evers, of Santa Cruz, is a welder. He retires after 21 years with the Boardwalk. "For the first 18 years, I rode the roller coaster everyday," said Evers.

Getting a free ride on the Giant Dipper was never a problem for the maintenance crew.

During test runs, "they always needed somebody to ride to add some weight on the back," said Ryder.

Fravel didn't jump at the chance, though. He admitted to taking only two thrill cruises on the coaster. "I'm chicken to ride 'em."

Fravel preferred more benign adventure, like talking to Walt Disney. He said a visit with Disney during the Sixties at the

Boardwalk was a memorable occasion. Disney had come to inspect the Autorama cars.

Fravel hurt his back on the job awhile ago, but said he would do some camping in his leisure hours.

"What I enjoyed during the winter was the tourists were gone and I could get into the mechanical operations more. By Easter, you grew tired of just that, but then the pretty girls showed up. By Labor Day you couldn't stand the people anymore," said Fravel.

Protocol was more casual at the Boardwalk during the old days, said the men.

"During the winter, if a couple busloads of people arrived when it was closed, we'd open the rides up one by one," remembered Fravel.

One time, said Fravel, he opened up the merry-go-round for a group of tourists when the amusement park was closed for the winter. "I made \$100, turned it over to the office and they didn't even know the ride was open."

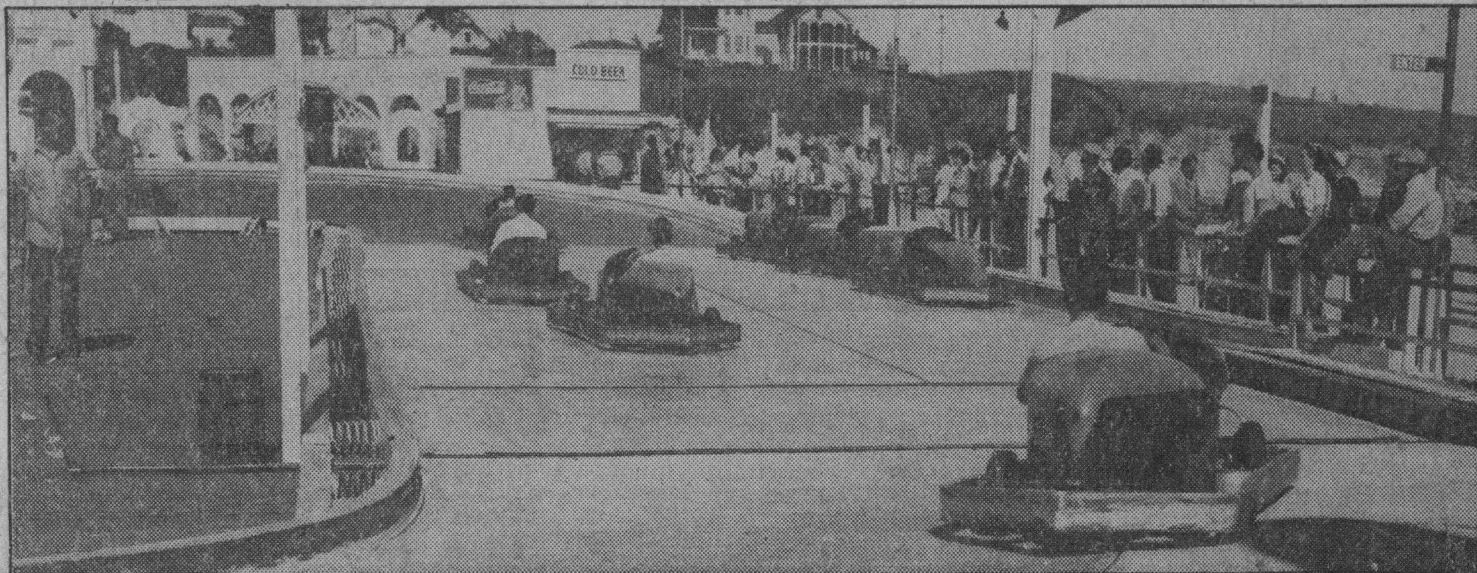
Even today, said Ryder, on a sunny day in the off-season, the operations crew will open up the carousel.

In 1962 the maintenance crew tore down the "pleasure pier" used by the Seaside Company to house pipes which transported saltwater to the Boardwalk for the indoor plunge. The water was heated before going into the giant pool.

After the pier was gone, Ryder said "they tried for a year to run the plunge with freshwater, but no one wanted it. They could swim in their swimming pools at home in freshwater. So we filled it with sand and made a (miniature) golf course out of it."



Dick Ryder, Bill Fravel and John Evers



The bumper cars were outdoors in the good old days at the Boardwalk