

A stormy reawakening for Capitola's fishing wharf

By BILL AKERS

The early morning skies were dark and threatening, but the clouds parted and the sun broke through long enough Saturday afternoon to light up the Capitola Wharf dedication ceremonies. It was a cool, breezy day, the clouds adding a dramatic touch to the spectacular view to be had from the resurrected wharf, and a couple of hundred people were on hand to help mark the occasion.

Also on hand were officials representing all the levels of government which had a hand in bringing about something akin to a miracle - the rescue of the wharf which has been a significant part of Capitola's history for 125 years. Thought to be damaged beyond repair by vicious sea storms, the wharf was closed to the public 2½ years ago. Then began a long process of bringing it back to life - a process involving the wharf owners, the city, county, state and federal governments. Saturday's dedication ceremony was the culmination of those efforts.

Mayor Jerry Clark said the city had been "waiting 125 years for this day," and he gave credit to City Manager Steve Burrell for being the "mastermind" behind the resurrection of the wharf.

It was Burrell, calling upon his experience as Assistant to the City Manager in San Clemente before coming to Capitola, who figured out a plan to save the wharf. He was able to persuade the little-known state Wildlife Conservation Board to fund half of the reconstruction costs, and to get another 25 percent contribution from the federal government.

He worked out an arrangement with Rick and Jenni-

fer Karleen, who had purchased the wharf, in which the Karleens would deed the wharf to the city in exchange for a long-term concession agreement. All in all, it was to become an \$800,000 reconstruction project.

It isn't over yet, for Karleen, as soon as he receives Coastal Commission approval of his plans, will start construction on buildings that will house a snack bar, bait and tackle shop, boat launching and rental services.

Likening the rebuilt wharf to a ship about to be launched, Mayor Clarke called up the Rev. William Corbey of St. Joseph's Catholic Church to give it a blessing.

Rep. Leon Panetta, said he was "here as an Italian - you really need an Italian to dedicate a wharf," and said the project was "a tribute to the community, a tribute to the way you have all come together to make this a reality."

State Sen. Henry Mello called the wharf "a valuable resource for this community which will give many hours of recreation and enjoyment. It is a real example of a partnership of state, federal and local governments working together," Mello said.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Gary Patton said "the city has proved it is a good steward for this facility," and said it would become a "pleasurable place for people of the nation, the state, county and Capitola."

Supervisor Robley Levy added her praise for those who brought it about; and Chet Hart, of the Wildlife Conservation Board, said that the city just got in under the wire with its request for help, "for this is some of the last money

we're going to get for this kind of project."

Originally known as Soquel Landing, the wharf opened for the first time in 1857 as a ship-loading facility for ocean-going commerce. At that time, it was heavily used by Pacific Steamship Co. vessels which carried local goods to the San Francisco area. Later, the wharf served the commercial fishing industry, finally evolving over the years as a major recreational facility.

In early 1978, the wharf sustained heavy damage from a series of devastating storms which necessi-

tated it being closed to the public. It was then the Karleens obtained ownership and began working with the city on a rebuilding project. The rebuilding began in February with a contract let to Alan R. Barreca of Redwood City.

"This venture truly marks the beginning of an era," said Mayor Clarke in a printed message. "We should all take pride in knowing that our future generations, because of the foresight of our present citizens, will have this beautiful structure to pass on to their children."

A morning-long fishing

derby run by Councilman Ron Graves was one of the day's events. The adult winners were Mike Lyford, of Capitola, who caught a 14½ pound ray; and Paul Monk, Aptos, and John Parker, Santa Cruz, who each caught 12 ounce kingfish.

Youthful winners were Cary Schirmer, 13, 14 oz. king; James Kelly, 8, 11 oz. king; Rick Risso, 14, 10 oz. king; and Dave and Rudy Potter who won a prize for being the most enthusiastic fishermen in the derby. The woman's prize went to Elsie Stiltner for her 11 oz. catch.

REFERENCE



Rep. Leon Panetta, state Sen. Henry Mello, Supervisor Robley Levy (standing), Councilman Ron Graves and state wildlife official Chet Hart were among those who helped "launch" the Capitola wharf Saturday.

Photo by Bill Akers