

100 YEARS YOUNG

BOARDWALK STILL LOOKS GOOD IN A BIKINI

Boardwalk

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Whitney Bricker and Falesha Akton show off their bikinis next to a Boardwalk display featuring a swimsuit from 100 years ago.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Amusement park has seen swimsuit trends change

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an occasional series examining the cultural, political and economic role of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. The Boardwalk celebrates its centennial this year.

By **MATT KING**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Know what you don't see at the beach anymore? Pantaloon. Not even in the winter.

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■ Boardwalk celebrates birthday with fireworks show.

THE GUIDE

The Boardwalk turns 100 today and perhaps nothing has changed more in the past century at the amusement park than what women

And that's a good thing, sun-bathers hanging out at Main Beach said Thursday.

"That's covering too much. It's a dress," bikini-clad Falesha Akton said of a picture of a circa 1912 bathing suit. "It's too much material."



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Marilyn Matthews, 73 and a former swimsuit model, once posed in swimsuits for Boardwalk publicity shots.



Contributed photos
Marilyn Matthews, above and below, was the Boardwalk's swimsuit model in the '50s.





Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Capitola Museum curator Carolyn Swift peers into the 1907 cottage exhibit in front of the museum, which includes a mannequin wearing a bathing suit from that period. The one-room cottage was part of Cottage City near the Boardwalk and is filled with items from the era, including a mousetrap, bottom left.

Bikinis

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wear to the beach.

A hundred years ago, middle-class women brought their children to Santa Cruz and Capitola to escape the Central Valley heat and hit the surf in caps, bloomers and wool overskirts. On Thursday, Akton and her friends came down from Benicia for the day to talk to guys and soak up the sun. No one would accuse them of wearing too much.

"I'd like to wear a one-piece but people would laugh at me. It's not the style," Vanessa Walker, 20, said. "I feel naked. I'd rather have more covering."

Since the Boardwalk opened in 1907, promoters have used women in bathing suits to lure people to the amusement park.

The first Miss California pageant was held there in 1924, and in a 1932 publicity stunt Fred Swanton called out the City Council and Police Department to make sure women modeling the latest beachwear were dressed appropriately for Santa Cruz. They were.

In the 1940s, women started showing a little leg. And in the 1950s, the two-piece came to Santa Cruz.

"The suits became more fashion-oriented," said Judy Steen, who created a swimwear exhibit on display at the Museum of Art and History. "They were more

structured to flatter the figure and make you look more amply endowed than you were. As bathing suits became more a way to show off the body and get tan, there was less suit."

But the two-piece of 1957 was not what we know today. The first time fashion model Marilyn Matthews showed off her midriff in an advertisement for the Boardwalk, she had to cinch the sides of the bottom with shoelaces to reveal a little more skin. Then her father saw the picture on a passing bus.

"Nobody wore bikinis back then. It showed off my belly button and everything," Matthews said. "He had a fit."

Matthews doesn't wear swimsuits much anymore, but she's a big fan of the bikini.

"I don't know so much about the thong, that's not very attractive," she said, "but if you have a nice figure I think [a bikini] shows it off well. The young girls today are pretty revealing whether they're wearing a bikini or not."

The thong is where most American sunbathers draw the line, and stateside beaches haven't seen much of the bottom-only monokini, either. And after 100 years of innovation, we may have seen the swimsuit's final frontier.

"I'm not sure how much further it can go," Steen said. "There's no profit for swimsuit designers to sell you thin air."

Contact Matt King at
mking@santacruzsentinel.com.