

# Capitola Sunset

FALL 2018

CAPITOLA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

NEWS, EVENTS & INFORMATION

*"Providing a future for our past"*

## RPOs and HPOs

By Frank Perry

Until recently, the title of this article would have been meaningless to me. But that's the great thing about local history—there's always something new to learn.

In the "Postmarked Capitola" exhibition of 2015, I pointed out that back in the early 1900s you could mail a postcard from Capitola in the morning and have it delivered in Oakland or San Francisco later that same day. I did not give much thought to the mechanics of this, other than that the mail was carried by railroad. I have since learned more about how this worked.

Passenger trains often included a "mail car," but this was not simply a car with bags of mail, it was a post office on wheels or Railway Post Office (abbreviated RPO). Inside, specially-trained clerks sorted the mail en route, greatly speeding up mail service. Say, for example, mail bags picked up in Capitola, Santa Cruz, and San Jose all contained mail for addresses in Oakland. The clerks would separate the Oakland mail and put it in a bag for delivery to the Oakland Post Office.



Here is a look inside a Railway Post Office train car with bags of mail and sorting bins. These RPOs allowed mail to be delivered from Capitola to The Bay Area efficiently and sometimes the same day.

At their height in the early 1900s, there were RPO cars on over 9,000 U.S. train routes, covering more than 200,000 miles. The cars also had mail slots for people who wanted

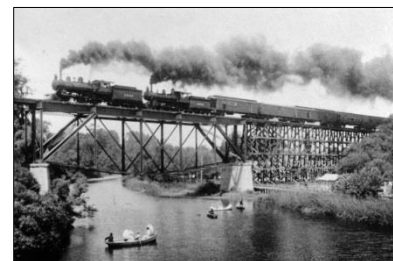
to mail a letter while the RPO was parked at a station. Mail deposited directly into the car was given a special RPO postmark. These showed the date, the route, and said "RPO." In the example shown here, the postcard was postmarked December 20, 1908 on the San Francisco, Pajaro & Santa Cruz route (Route TR23). The cancellation says "RMS," short for Railway Mail Service.



At that time the railroad tunnels through the Santa Cruz Mountains were still closed due to the 1906 earthquake and the decision to convert them to standard gauge. They did not re-open until 1909. So, all passenger trains from the Bay Area came to Capitola and Santa Cruz by way of Chittenden Pass and the community of Pajaro (just across the river from Watsonville).

After WWII, delivery of mail by railroad began to decline, replaced by airplanes and trucks. The last RPO was in 1977.

Starting in 1941, there were also Highway Post Offices (HPOs) which used busses. One of these ran from San Francisco to Pacific Grove, and passed through Soquel but not Capitola. The last of America's HPOs also ended in the 1970s.



# Capitola Reflections—The Summer of 1959

By Phil Curtiss

*From Phil Curtiss: My mom started coming to Capitola as a child in 1925. It was definitely a family ritual. The only years they missed were the war years. As soon as my generation formed, we came too. Now it was aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, parents, siblings (real and temporarily adopted for the occasion), all meeting at our pie-in-the-sky place—Capitola. That was from the mid-fifties to mid-sixties. Then, life stepped in. After college in San Diego, I lived and worked overseas before returning to California to continue my career as a teacher...that is, I returned to Capitola. I've been living here, minus the odd year or two, traveling and volunteering overseas since 1980. I'm retired now, surfing as much as I can, tutoring kids in math and science, and doing a little writing. I hope you enjoy this little story about a little kid (me) enjoying his summer in Capitola.*

It was still there behind locked glass doors among the many other prizes on the shelves along the wall at the Capitola Playhouse—that special pocketknife that caught my eye the summer before. It had deer bone casing and three blades, and it came with a leather pouch. I had to have it.

The knife was the most expensive prize in the Capitola Playhouse. I counted my tickets that I had saved from last summer—(110) and still had a long way to go. I would have to get really good at Skee Ball and Pokerino this year, or I'd blow all the money saved mowing lawns and head home busted and knifeless.



Skee Ball took finesse. You had to have the right push and flick of the wrist to hit the 50 hole. If the ball bounced off the edge, you only got 10 points. Was it better to go for the larger 30 or 40 holes and take a 20 if you missed? There were so many strategies.



Going for the 50-hole often meant that you would have to settle for 10. Was it better to shoot for the 30- or 40-hole and settle for 20 if you missed? Summer in Capitola brought with it many tough decisions.

The Pokerino machine was even tougher. How the heck would you direct each ball into one of 36 identical holes, all evenly spaced on a flat board? That's what had to happen though to get the massive ticket payout of a Four-of-a-Kind or a Royal Flush.



This image from the mid-1960s was taken out in front of the Capitola Playhouse. As the kids of Capitola got older, the fun became funner. If you know, or recognize anyone in this image, give us a shout at the Capitola Museum, 831-464-0322. It would be fun know who's who.

I had my work cut out for me. It was time to wipe the sand off my quarters and get going.

But, soon the distracting smell of Babe's French fries from next door wafted through the Playhouse. Those tasty, thick-cut golden brown fries came in cool, little plastic boats. And, I still needed to buy bait to catch the huge halibut that, rumor had it, hung out in the sand below the wharf.

It might be a three-summer project to get that knife.



Pokerino was more difficult than it looks. The little balls had to be strategically tossed into the correct holes to make a poker hand. The most tickets were paid out for a Four-of-a-Kind or a Royal Flush.



## Museum Annex at Art and Wine Festival

By Niels Kisling

Your Capitola Museum took it to the streets last month during the Capitola Art and Wine Festival. We had a portable display under the historic Canary Islands Date Palm across from Esplanade Park. The skies were blue, the temperatures comfortable, and the people showed up in record numbers!

This year, we held a drawing for two historical prints. Permission to print the images and make them available to the public was donated by John and Anne Nicol, and Covello and Covello in Santa Cruz. We made two of each print available and through the generosity of festival visitors, the museum raised a lot of money in donations.



This aerial image from 1950 shows the Capitola Airport, Highway 1 before pavement and includes five Capitola Neighborhoods, making it very popular with visitors to The Capitola Art and Wine Festival.

We featured an ever-popular display of vintage Shadowbrook menus. The menu from 1954 makes it hard to choose from the Whole Baby Broiled Lobster or the Filet Mignon which are priced at \$3.50 and \$4.00. You could begin your meal in 1954 with a Caesar Salad and conclude it with Flaming Cherries Jubilee—both just \$1.25 extra.

Congratulations to the following people chosen in our drawing: Chris Carson, Bobby Peterson, Craig Lazanich. Special thanks go out to Maryann Lin, who was the highest bid in our silent auction for a John and Anne Nicol print of Panoramic Capitola from 1899. Special thanks go out to everyone who supported our drawings.



Museum Board Member David Peyton presents the Capitola Airport image to our drawing winner, Chris Carson.

As usual, these offsite events hosted by your Capitola Museum are not possible without the help of our great volunteers. This year David Biancalana, Miriam Braverman, Ted Connor, Rebecca Hobson and David Peyton contributed to our success.



Museum volunteer David Biancalana enthusiastically worked the crowd hard producing smiles and promoting tickets for our drawings.



Museum volunteer Miriam Braverman takes a moment to pose next to the 1899 Capitola Village Panorama donated by John and Anne Nicol.



Museum volunteer Ted Connor shares a light moment with David Biancalana on a picture-perfect day in Capitola Village.



Museum Board Members Rebecca Hobson and David Peyton entertain Art and Wine visitor, Rick Heblon, by showing off a can of 'bomb shelter water' from the 1950s that is 'impervious to nuclear fallout.'

# First Annual Capitola Beach Festival

By David Peyton

During the final September weekend, locals celebrated the end of the summer season with a two-day festival to replace the retired Capitola Begonia Festival. Event organizers, many from the former Begonia Festival organization, decided to test the community's appetite for a new tradition—The Capitola Beach Festival. Support from the City of Capitola and the business community helped launch the first festival, featuring some of the most popular activities of the Begonia Festival.

To initiate the new Beach Festival schedule of activities, a partnership was formed with the Wharf to Wharf organization (which holds an annual 10K race ending in Capitola Village) to hold a 3-mile Fun Run ending at a balloon arch finish line mid-way up the Esplanade. In its inaugural year, nearly 3,000 runners, some dressed in superhero costumes, entire families running together, and a tutu or two got the weekend of activities started.



Capitola Mayor, Mike Termini and David Peyton watch all the action at the finish line in the first inaugural 3-Mile Fun Run.

Sandwiched between the Fun Run kick-off and the final activity, the ever popular Row Boat Races on Sunday, the village filled with participants and observers—mostly locals who came out to play and enjoy a weekend with smaller crowds, and as it turned out, beautiful weather. And play they did.

Always competitive, the Horseshoe Tournament filled the air with the clang of ringers and near misses and the excited shouts of winners (and the occasional curse of a loser). Novices and pros teamed-up in hopes of bringing home a trophy, but regardless of the outcome, everyone appeared to have a wonderful time and competitors looked forward to another tournament in Capitola.

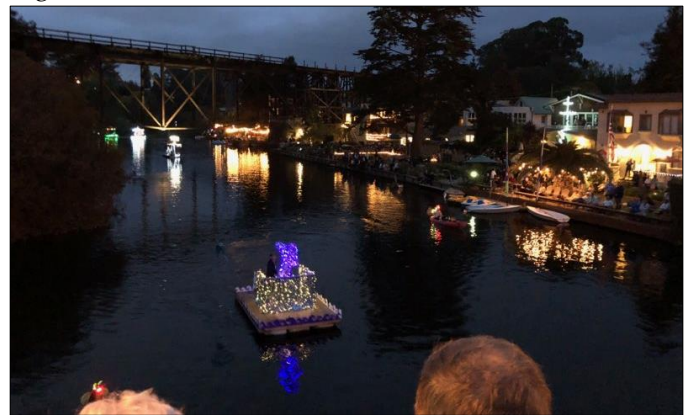
All ages were lined up at the Capitola Wharf gate in the dark, waiting for a chance to catch the biggest (or smallest) fish in what has become a “must do event” for our local fishermen. The early morning start to the Fishing Derby doesn't deter the 100 or more who expect to have a good time regardless of what they catch, or don't

catch. Lined up along the wharf railing, with poles jutting out and lines soaking bait, they await the sunrise and the catch of the day.

Another favorite activity that begins early, the Sand Sculpture Contest, drew hundreds along the Capitola Beach. All ages, armed with buckets, shovels, and loads of sand sculpture necessities settled along the shoreline in designated areas. This year Harry Potter characters figured in a number of winning sculptures. The short-lived sand creations enthralled beachgoers throughout the day, but alas, were gone the following morning.

Budding artists of all ages enjoy Chalk Art on the Sea Wall. A Begonia Festival favorite, everyone (children first) gets a baggie with colored chalk and is sent off to a numbered spot on top of the sea wall. Inspiration carries the day and the result is an enchanting pastel chalk mural nearly the length of a football field. People sit on the wall all day and unknowingly carry away some of the chalk on the seat of their pants—proving that this particular art is indeed transitory.

In hopes of starting a tradition worthy of past nautical parades, event organizers decided to try a nighttime nautical parade with lighted floats as a replacement for the elaborate begonia decorated floats. The theme was Capitola Magic, and a small but mighty fleet of floats did their best to capture local magic in dazzling light displays. The parade was enthusiastically received, crowds were small enough to allow for good viewing, and it appears that a new nautical parade tradition may have begun.



Joanne Kising Photo

What a sight! As dusk settled on Capitola village, thousands lined Stockton Bridge and the Soquel Creek lagoon to cheer on the lighted floats in the first Capitola Beach Festival Nautical Parade.

The Row Boat Races finished up the weekend activities. In keeping with the family focus, competition among family members was popular and often fierce. Spirited sprints had spectators cheering wildly as teams headed for home and good natured laughs were heard as some teams rowed in circles, getting caught in creek side bushes, or heading in the wrong direction. Winner's ribbons were proudly displayed and promises of rematches were made for next year.

## Meet our New Board Members

By Pam Greeninger

It is my pleasure to introduce and welcome our board's newest members, Rebecca Hobson and Brian Legakis.

### Rebecca Hobson

On June 14, 2018, the Capitola City Council appointed Rebecca to fill an unexpired term ending June 9, 2019. Rebecca attended her first board meeting on July 10 and immediately volunteered to coordinate the refreshments for the Capitola Coloring Book signing event on July 21. She did an outstanding job, and we are so happy to have her on the board!

Rebecca is a native of Portland, Oregon, and moved to California during the 1980s. She spent several years living and working in Silicon Valley before she discovered Capitola. It was love at first sight, and she has now lived here full-time for 10 years. In fact, Rebecca met her husband, Michael, on the Capitola Wharf in 2010 and they were married in May of 2014.

Before her appointment to the Museum Board, Rebecca previously served as a volunteer for the Capitola Begonia Festival, the Capitola Library Ad-Hoc Committee, and for the Mid-County Senior Center. When an opening on the Museum Board came up, Rebecca decided to apply as she has always enjoyed learning about history. She attributes her love of history to her mother, who shared her knowledge and interest in history with her while she was growing up. Rebecca is excited to have the opportunity to serve on the Board with others who are clearly passionate about Capitola and its history. Rebecca wants to help promote the Capitola Museum to locals and the many visitors who visit from around the world.

In her "spare time" Rebecca is an avid reader, loves to cook and is always ready for a travel adventure.

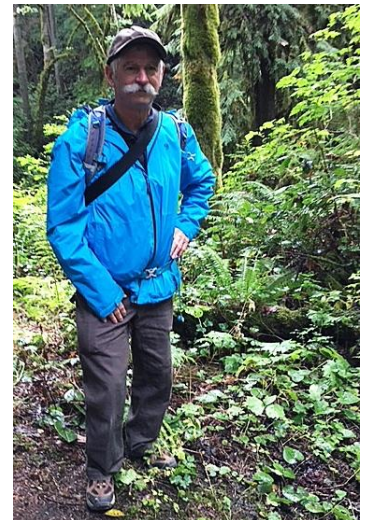


### Brian Legakis

On September 4, 2018, Brian attended his first Museum Board meeting. He was appointed by the City Council on August 9th for a 3-year term expiring in June 2021.

Brian grew up in Berkeley, California. He went to UC Davis in Biological Sciences, but switched to Art History for Graduate School at the University of Chicago. From there he was sent to Greece where he studied for 2 years at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. After graduating he entered his profession of Art History teaching in the 1970s and spent some 40 years in the field covering every age group from junior high to graduate school. Brian tells me that he truly loved teaching and helping students reach their educational goals. Just recently he retired from Cabrillo College after teaching for 31 years there.

Everyone asks him why he doesn't move away from Santa Cruz now that he has retired since his wife and he enjoy traveling so much to special places. Their current passion is to stay in historic hotels of California. Brian says he explains to those who ask why they remain here that they love Santa Cruz County and could not think of moving after relocating to Aptos in 1980. Brian is very active and now that he is retired he has even more time to take full advantage of the outdoors here, including surfing, kayaking, sailing, and hiking in the many parks of the coast and mountains. His wife and he love museums and visit them all over the world and in the west. One of his desires for a number of years has been to write a guide to museums of the Monterey Bay, and he hopes that he will now have the time to complete the task.



Brian is excited to join the Museum board and looks forward to focusing on the Capitola Historical Museum, a special place he has admired for many years.

### Save the Date—

The Capitola Community Fundraiser at Shadowbrook will benefit your Capitola Museum. Once again Shadowbrook is donating 33% of all proceeds from the evening to the museum. The event is Tuesday, March 19, 2019.

## Visitors from Around the World

By Pam Greeninger

On Friday afternoon, July 27, 2018, I popped into the Capitola Museum and was chatting with volunteer George Wightman when a group of 7 people walked in.

George welcomed the group and asked where they were from. The spokesperson for the group, Martin Askanas, informed us they were visiting from Fushun, China.

Museum visitor, Piao Jing Xin, is the Pastor of a Chinese Christian Church and would be playing the violin at several churches in Santa Cruz County.

We enjoyed talking with them about their country. It turns out Martin used to live in Capitola and has fond memories of the area. His mother lives at Sunshine Villa and is 82 years old. Here's a photo of 5 members of the group: Piao Gui Chun, Piao Jing Zan, Piao Jing Xin, Martin Askanas, and Kui Fuli.



The Capitola Museum has recently received generous donations from:

Steven Burbank	Toni Castro
Coralie Ciraulo	Dianne and Ron Graves
Lani Hall	Jed and Helen Myall
David Peyton	Barbara Reding
Shadowbrook Restaurant	Debbie Vilotti
Susan & Nels Westman	Richard & Kathleen Wilson
Carolyn Swift in memory of Peter McGettigan	

Recently, the following artifacts were generously donated to the Capitola Museum:

### John Nicol:

Photos of Fire Department

### Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History:

Historical artifacts

### City of Capitola, Public Works Department:

Old aerial photos of Capitola

## Monte Foundation Fireworks Light Up the Sky

By Niels Kisling

On October 7 the Monte Foundation 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fireworks Extravaganza lit up the skies over Capitola. This year's recipient of funds raised from the event will be the Capitola Library. The Monte Foundation supports our local communities.



People crowd the cliffs on Prospect Avenue overlooking the Capitola Wharf on a balmy Sunday night in October. The weather was great and the fireworks show was even better.

Joanne Kisling Photo

## Do All Pictures Need a Thousand Words?

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. But, like the image below, some pictures don't need words. This picture captures many of the reasons why I live here; the ocean, the beach, sailboats, our fantastic community, and the creativity that abounds all around us.



Joanne Kisling Photo

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Museum Hours: Thursday through Sunday 12-4 P.M.

Curator: Frank Perry

Board Members: Niels Kisling (President), David Peyton (Vice President), Pam Greeninger (Secretary), Rebecca Hobson (Treasurer), Brian Legakis, Georgette Neal, and Gordon van Zuiden