

NewsBank InfoWeb

America's Newspapers

Estimated printed pages: 5

Los Angeles Times

September 22, 1985

Edition: Orange County Edition

Section: Metro

Page: 2-1

Gala for Old Love

Beach Town Pier Is Back in Business

Author: GARY JARLSON; Times Staff Writer Metro Desk

Article Text:

"We've got a big day planned Saturday and that's all I need . . . a tidal wave," Paul Cook said, his voice tinged by a mixture of frustration and bemusement.

Cook, as director of public works, has spent the better part of the last two years shepherding the restoration of the **Huntington Beach Pier**, one of three Orange County **piers** that were heavily damaged during the violent winter storms of 1983.

And here it was Thursday, just a couple of days before the festive reopening of the 1,800-foot structure, and a tsunami , or tidal wave, alert had been issued after a major earthquake off the coast of Mexico.

Goodyear Blimp Overhead

The emergency passed, and the celebration came off as

scheduled--complete with an appearance by the Goodyear blimp--with hundreds of people crowding the pier Saturday for the city-sponsored gala.

But the message was clear. Despite their massive size and the fact that they are products of sophisticated engineering technology, piers are, at best, feeble attempts by man to extend his reach away from land and out into the ocean.

"We've rebuilt it stronger than it's ever been, stronger than it was in the past and it would take one hell of a storm to damage it," Cook said. "But there's still no way to tell what the ocean is going to do."

What the ocean has done several times in the past and will, no doubt, do again in the future is rise up and sweep away all before it with forces that make man's best effort seem puny by comparison.

Still, even in the face of such lopsided odds against longevity, officials in Huntington Beach, San Clemente and Seal Beach did not hesitate in the wake of the 1983 storms to begin rebuilding their shattered piers at a total cost of more than \$5 million.

Part of the Community

"When that pier went down, it was not a question of if we were going to rebuild it but how soon we could do it," said Dan Joseph, assistant city manager in Seal Beach. "It was a part of the community even before there was a city of Seal Beach. It could never be contemplated that there would be a Seal Beach without a Seal Beach Pier."

A measure of the pier's value to the Seal Beach community is seen in the fact that more than \$140,000 was raised privately, to help rebuild the structure. And when the pier was rededicated in May, it, too, was cause for a massive civic celebration, with about 7,500 people jamming the boardwalk at Ocean Avenue and Main Street.

Why such a love affair with piers?

It's probably because piers can be many things to many different people.

They've been called "the poor man's way of going to sea." They can serve as an imaginary fishing boat or a yacht, transporting an individual away from it all.

Catherine Weaver lives in the Midwest now, but she grew up in California and can remember family trips to the beach at San Clemente.

"We couldn't get too far out into the water from the beach because of the waves, but on the pier it seemed like we could go clear out to Hawaii," she said one balmy afternoon as she introduced the two grandchildren she was visiting to some of her own youthful reveries. "There was no way our family could have ever owned a boat. But out here at the end of the pier, we kids could pretend we were on a yacht or an ocean liner headed for all sorts of exotic places."

Tranquility, Excitement

To Frank Watson, piers are places of tranquility and of excitement. Sometimes, now that he's retired, he can just be alone with his thoughts as he sits and stares out to sea. Other times, he is part of a vibrant community that seems to exist nowhere else but on a pier.

"Then I feel like I'm part of one big family," Watson said as he strolled along the pier at Huntington Beach. "I can talk with the fishermen about the good or bad luck they're having. It's almost always bad luck. I've even learned quite a bit about surfing just listening and talking with the kids out here."

Of course, public entertainment and recreation were not the uppermost considerations when piers began appearing along Orange County's coastline in the 19th Century. Those piers, the first of which went in at Woods Cove in Laguna Beach about 1886, were used for shipping raw materials and supplies in and out of the area.

Years later, Orange County's six piers--seven if you include the small fishing pier in Dana Point Harbor--continue to serve a commercial purpose, providing a base for numerous shops, cafes and tourist facilities.

'A Key Point'

"You would have to think of it as a focal point of our beach and recreation interests because we have the 'pier bowl,' which is sort of a natural amphitheater there," said Lynn Hughes, marine safety captain for San Clemente. "It's a key point and sort of an extension of that whole area, which has a parking lot, a picnic area and a lot of shops."

Huntington Beach spent \$900,000 to repair its pier, plus \$400,000 to repair and expand The End Cafe-- but that \$1.3-million public expenditure is only the beginning. The pier will be the main focus of a multimillion redevelopment of the area that will include a new shopping area, hotels and high-rise office buildings.

There's "no question that the pier is a focal point for downtown" says Huntington Beach's Cook. "It's just a tremendous attraction. You have 1.5 million people walking out on it every year. And that's not just locals but also tourists, from not only all different areas but also a lot of different countries," he said.

Cook's prediction came true Saturday. A tourist-like atmosphere prevailed at the pier's 4 p.m. reopening ceremony. Camera-carrying spectators snapped pictures of the views, and some brought sophisticated home movie cameras to record the sights and sounds of the event.

Marveled at Changes

Even the Goodyear blimp came to hover a few hundred feet above the crowd at the end of the pier for a few minutes before tilting upward and motoring away into the sky. Inside The End Cafe, rebuilt into a two-story, full-service restaurant, spectator Barbara Dow marveled at the changes.

"I loved this place (the cafe) when it was crummy," said Dow, 52, who has been visiting the pier since moving to Huntington Beach in 1946. "Now it's going to be a real delight coming here."

About 2,000 commemorative posters were given away in an hour as city officials, released from the crush of the overcrowded VIP buffet on the second floor of The End Cafe, welcomed the crowd and dedicated the renovations. Two strolling mariachi bands and the Oceanview High School band entertained the crowd, and Miss Huntington Beach, Jill Gray, smiled and shook a few hands.

Seemingly oblivious to the official pier whoop-de-doo, it was just another day for the pier's fishermen and regular patrons of the pier's tiny Neptune's Locker bar.

"I love the people, the variety. There's always things to do here," Dow said of the throngs of tourists and fishermen on the pier below the restaurant. "It's odd, though, I've never seen anyone catch a fish."

Orange County Piers

Three of the largest of Orange County's six piers were destroyed or severely damaged during the heavy winter storms in early 1983. Two years and nearly \$5 million later the Seal Beach, Huntington Beach and San Clemente piers have been rebuilt and, in some cases, even improved.

First Original Length Reconstruction

built cost cost

Seal Beach Pier 1906 NA 1,865 feet \$2.3 million

Huntington Beach Pier 1914 \$72,000 1,800 feet \$900,000

Newport Pier 1,032 feet

Balboa Pier 919 feet

Aliso Pier 660 feet

San Clemente Pier 1928 \$75,000 1,296 feet \$1.4 million

Times staff writer James S. Granelli contributed to this story.

Research by DAVID COTLIAR / Los Angeles Times

Caption:

PHOTO: Hundreds of celebrators jam the seaward end of Huntington Beach Pier for Saturday's reopening ceremony.

PHOTOGRAPHER: COLIN CRAWFORD

PHOTO: Strongly built, but fragile in the embrace of the sea, the Huntington Beach Pier offers many things to many different people.

PHOTOGRAPHER: GAIL FISHER / Los Angeles Times

GRAPHIC-TABLE: Orange County Piers

GRAPHIC-DRAWING: Orange County Piers, MICHAEL HALL

Copyright, The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 1985

Record Number: 000089012

Article Bookmark(OpenURL Compliant):Gala for Old LoveBeach Town Pier Is Back in Business (Los Angeles Times, September 22, 1985)
http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:NewsBank:LATB&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0EB426F35D1C156B&svc_dat=InfoWeb:aggregated3&req_dat=0DBF0023CE26A440