

Bonitafest History

by Steve Schoenherr

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS YEAR'S BONITAFEST '15 AND PICTURES



The first Bonitafest parade Oct. 19, 1973, featured antique cars, drill teams, bands, horses and children pulling wagons carrying goats, chickens, and dogs.
(Photo from the Bonita Museum)

When she purchased Village Togs in 1971, little did Emily Ritter realize the whirlwind she had set in motion. It took Emily and her partner Beth Marks just realize that most of the Bonita merchants didn't know each other. Emily was soon canvassing the valley to get merchants to create the Bonita Business and Professional Association. Though the BBPA started strong out of the gate, attendance at meetings soon dropped. Emily suggested that they do something to noticed like have an Oktoberfest, and Adelle Rockwell suggested they call in "Bonitafest." Within minutes, the group was working on this new special event event commenced with music and square dancing in the street on Friday, October 19, 1973. Saturday, October 20, began with a Flag Raising at 8:00 am, and Indian Guide Dancing and Drum Playing, a wine tasting, and an antique clothing fashion show. The old-time parade featured drill teams, bands, horses and pulling wagons carrying goats, chickens, and dogs. Many "Old-Timers" also rode antique cars in the parade, including Grand Marshals Commander and Mr. Olson who had first come to the valley in the 1920s. In the years since 1973, Bonitafest has grown and evolved. In the late 1970s, Bonitafest lasted Friday through Sunday. In recent years, it has been shortened to one day. In 1978, Max Branscomb wrote the first melodrama which was performed in a large tent on an empty lot, a tradition that continues to this day. In 1979, Pat and Kirk Dolan originated an Orange Crate Derby. For over 30 years, on the last Saturday in September Bonita has put on its best face and celebrated its heritage. The Bonita Museum and Cultural Center started out as an historical photograph exhibit Bonitafest. Through the generosity of the community, the city of Chula Vista and the county of San Diego, the Museum moved into a new building adjacent new Bonita Sunnyside library in 2005. (Schoenherr, *Bonita*, 2010.)



Designed by local architect Victor Wulff and inspired by the California Missions, the Brookside Winery Tasting Room was finished in 1965. It was at a meeting at the Tasting Room that the Bonita Business and Professional Association (BBPA) was born. The Tasting Room operated until the 1970s when it was remodeled for the North Island Credit Union. It is now the Performance Cyclery. (Photo from the Bonita Business and Professional Association.)

1971 - The Bonita Business and Professional Association (BBPA) was conceived in 1971 when a small group of the business owners met to get better acquainted and to work together in developing more customers for their embryonic establishments. Emily Ritter was the proprietor of Village Togs, a ladies clothing shop in the new shopping center on the southeast side of the intersection of Bonita Road and Allen School Road. Emily decided that it was time to let people know that there were up and coming businesses in the Valley. She started at Berg's Feed Barn on Bonita Road, on the north side of the road, between 805 and Willow, now known as the North Island Credit Union, and wended her way east, stopping at the newly built winery, now the North Island Credit Union. She enlisted the Anisodens, Claude and Sharon, then went to the intersection of Willow and Bonita Road, where Don Painter's Union 76 station was under construction. The Bonita Store was a real grocery store at that time and across the street was an old service station. The post office was next to the Bonita Store. She went on to the east, stopping at the Standard station that sat among eucalyptus trees by the side of the road where the Great American Federal Building now sits. She traveled on by the Big Bear Grocery and enlisted the nuclear pioneers in the new shopping center, where her own shop was located. She enlisted Dede Shields, realtor, Tommy Tompkins, Saddlery owner, Dr. Bob Fouchet, dentist, and Gretta Arnold in her Stitching Post. She canvassed the newly completed Chula Vista Golf Course and its restaurant, the Glenn. The shopping center where Vons now sits was an open field, so on to the Sunnyside Store at the east end of town. After several meetings, the group named itself and elected the officers for the first time. Dr. Bob Fouchet was elected the first president. Emily was the vice president, Dede Shields, secretary. (Chula Vista Historical Society. *Family, Friends and Homes*, 1991.)



Billy Casper with Lorraine Whittington and Emily Ritter preparing for a golf tournament to benefit the Community Hospital in 1973. Emily Ritter was president of the hospital auxiliary in Chula Vista and founder of the BBPA in Bonita. (Photo from Community Hospital)

1973 - Emily Ritter and the BBPA decided that the community needed to have an event to publicize the business area and in 1973 Emily suggested that they have an Octoberfest with "dancing in the streets and beer gardens." Adele Rockwell suggested that it be called the Bonitafest which was quickly accepted. This was the start of the now famous community celebrations. In October of 1973 a very large parade for such a small community (over 100 entries) started at the corner of Lakes Road and Bonita Road, proceeding down Bonita Road to Willow, past a small but enthusiastic crowd of onlookers. There were lots of horses and bands in the first parade. (Chula Vista Historical Society. *Family, Friends, and Homes*, 1991.)





1973/10/19 - Bonitafest commenced with music and square dancing in the street on Friday, October 19, 1973. Saturday, October 20, began with a Flag Raisi a.m., and included Indian Guide Dancing and Drum Playing, a wine tasting, and an antique clothing fashion show. The old-time parade featured drill teams, horses and children pulling wagons carrying goats, chickens, and dogs. Many "Old-Timers" also rode antique cars in the parade, including Grand Marshals Commander and Mrs. Allan Olson who had first come to the valley in the 1920s. In the years since 1973, Bonitafest has grown and evolved. In the late 1970 Bonitafest lasted Friday evening through Sunday. In recent years, it has been shortened to one day. In 1978, Max Branscomb wrote the first melodrama whic performed in a large tent erected on an empty lot, a tradition that continues to this day. In 1979, Pat and Kirk Dolan originated an Orange Crate Derby. For o years, on the last Saturday in September Bonita has put on its best face and celebrated its heritage. (Schoenherr, *Bonita*, 2010)

The *'News and Views of the Valley'*

Bonita Valley News

FIRST ANNUAL BONITAFEST EDITION

Welcome To The Bonitafest

Friday Night, Oct. 19th And Saturday, Oct. 20th, 1973



BONITA PLAZA
 American Cancer Society, Chula Vista Branch
 Granola Clayworks
 Sweetwater Valley Civic Association
 South Bay Pop Warner, T-Birds & Buzzards:
 (Beverages & food)
 Bonita Photo Art Studio
 Artistic Reflections
 Midge Mills - Antique Costumes

BONITA VILLAGE
 Bonita Vista American Field Service
 Big Brother of San Diego County
 His and Hers Metal Sculpture
 Mexican Club of St. Rose of Lima
 Montgomery Lions Club
 St. Rita's Church
 Sweetwater Woman's club
 Bonita Garden Club
 Bonita Village Artists
 Roots 'N Shoots
 Bonita Vista High PTA
 (Coffee & Doughnuts)
 Gary Garrison - 11:30-2:00

SAN DIEGO FEDERAL
 San Diego Charger Gary Garrison
 Farrells Ice Cream Parlour
 4-H Petting Zoo
 San Diego Conquistadors

BROOKSIDE WINERY
 Potpourri Artists
 (National City Artist Association)
 Wine Display & Tasting

BONITA PHARMACY
 South Bay Motorcycles
 Bonita 4-H Food Booth

SAN DIEGO TRUST & SAVINGS
 Paint Box
 Children's Evangelistic Fellowship
 Latter Day Saints Institute of Religion
 Santee Saddle Club
 Cornerstone

CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPARD
 (1:00 p.m. in the parking lot)
 Chili and Crackers Booth
 New and Used Book Sale

Schedule Of Events

FRIDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 19TH

Street Dancing, Square Dancing with caller Mr. Keith Fink, the "Sweet Adeline Singing Group", and refreshment booths will be open.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20TH

8:00 a.m. Raising of Colors by Boy Scouts
 9:00 a.m. Parade Formation
 9:45 a.m. Parade Begins
 11:00 a.m. History of Sound, presented by the Montgomery Lions Club
 11:15 a.m. Kid's Time at San Diego Federal - Refreshments, Sports Figures to meet, and balloons.
 11:30 a.m. Gary Garrison - S.D. Federal
 12:00 p.m. "The Foundation" Singing Group
 1:00 p.m. Antique Clothes Modeling by Midge Mills
 2:00 p.m. Conquistadors Basketball Shoot
 2:00 p.m. Winery Display & Tasting at Brookside Winery
 4:00 p.m. Bonita "thankyou" to all the people who made the "Bonitafest" possible.

Booths will open at 9:00 and remain open all day for your enjoyment and pleasure.

Added attractions will include Silhouette and Novelty photos all day by Bonita Photo Arts Studio and treats for the kiddies from Farrell's Ice Cream Parlour.

There's Going To Be A Parade

Come one, come all to the First Annual Bonitafest Parade at 9:45 a.m. this Saturday, October 20th. Thrill to the rousing music of the Naval Training Center Band, the formations of horses and the sight of antique automobiles! Greet the valley oldtimers who will be honorary Grand Marshalls, and cheer the Boy Scouts, American Legion, 4-H members and others who will march in the parade!

Entries include: Sunnyside Saddle Club, the Hole-In-The-Wall Gang, Bar-O-Riding Club, the Balboa Mounted Troop, the Chula Vista Mounted Police, the Frontier Inn, Sunnyside Elementary School, the Bonita Sun Stars 4-H Club, and Scout Troop 882.

(Continued on Page 3)

How To See The Parade

Bonita Road will be closed between Otay Lakes Road and Willow Road from 9-11:00 a.m. for the Bonitafest Parade on Saturday.

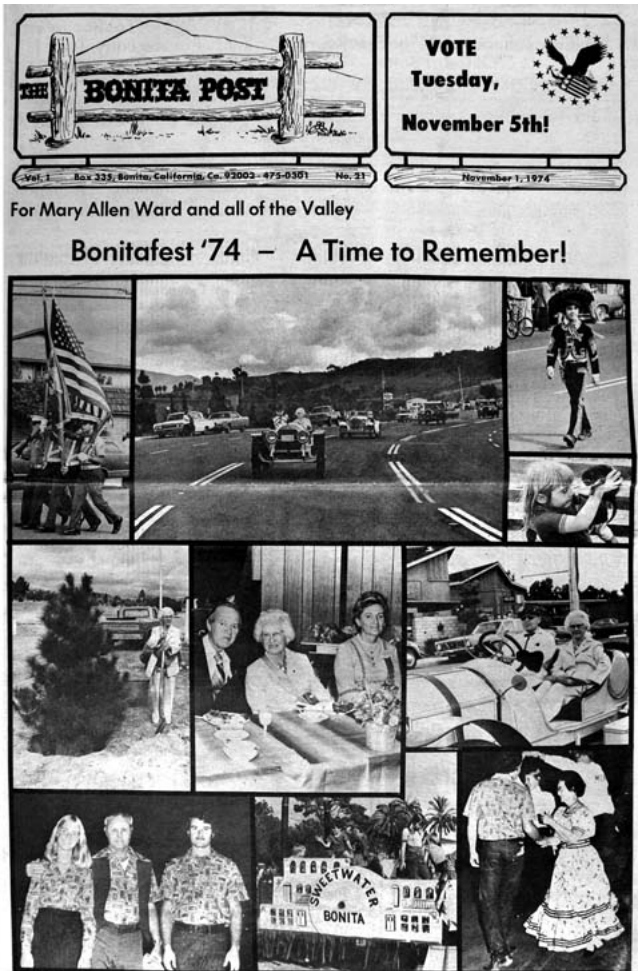
Spectators will find parking available at the Golf Course, along Allen Road, and in the area around Painter's Union 76.

Come early, for good parking and to get a good vantage point. The booths will open at 9:00 a.m. for your enjoyment and some will be serving coffee and doughnuts.

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
By
Bonita Valley
Publishing Co.

First Annual Bonitafest Edition of the *Bonita Valley News*, Oct. 20th, 1973. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1974 - In 1974 and again in 1985, Mary Ward was honorary Grand Marshal of the Bonitafest parade. Mary Allen Ward, who had been the oldest living native Bonita, died March 16, 1992, in the home that she and her first husband, Samuel Sherman, built on Bonita Mesa in 1924. She was approaching her 95th birthday having been born about one mile away on April 3, 1897, the second daughter and fourth child of Russell Carpenter Allen and Ella Bradford (Copeland) Allen National City High School and one year at Bryn Mawr, she graduated from University of California, Berkeley, in 1919 with honors in bacteriology, and completed a graduate certificate in nursing in 1922. She practiced nursing professionally only briefly, but for many years exercised a lively and practical concern for her neighbors in the Sweetwater Valley. She was a pioneer in the local development of the Visiting Nurses Association. Carrying on the social concerns of her she was president of the Boys and Girls Aid Society for many years, and served on local school boards and the county probation board. She also inherited a love of language, literature and the arts, and expressed these by tutoring in reading in the Chula Vista schools, and with active involvement in the Opera Board and Symphony Association. Throughout her early adult life, the family business was the Sweetwater Fruit Company, which she served for many years as secretary and bookkeeper. When the labor force became predominantly Mexican during World War II she became the principal counselor and advocate of the braceros, an surrogate mother to many. She was a driving force in the early development of a social life in Bonita being a founding member of the Sweetwater Woman's Club. She continued the family's social ties to San Diego as member and president of the Wednesday Club. After Sherman died in 1933, she formed a second happy home in 1938, with Butler E. Ward of San Diego. She broke him in to country life, and he carried her off on foreign travel. Their favorite place was Mexico, and they spent most of it. They had many wonderful friends in Bonita, Chula Vista, San Diego and La Jolla. Butler Ward died in 1973. (*Chula Vista Star-News*, March 21, 1992)



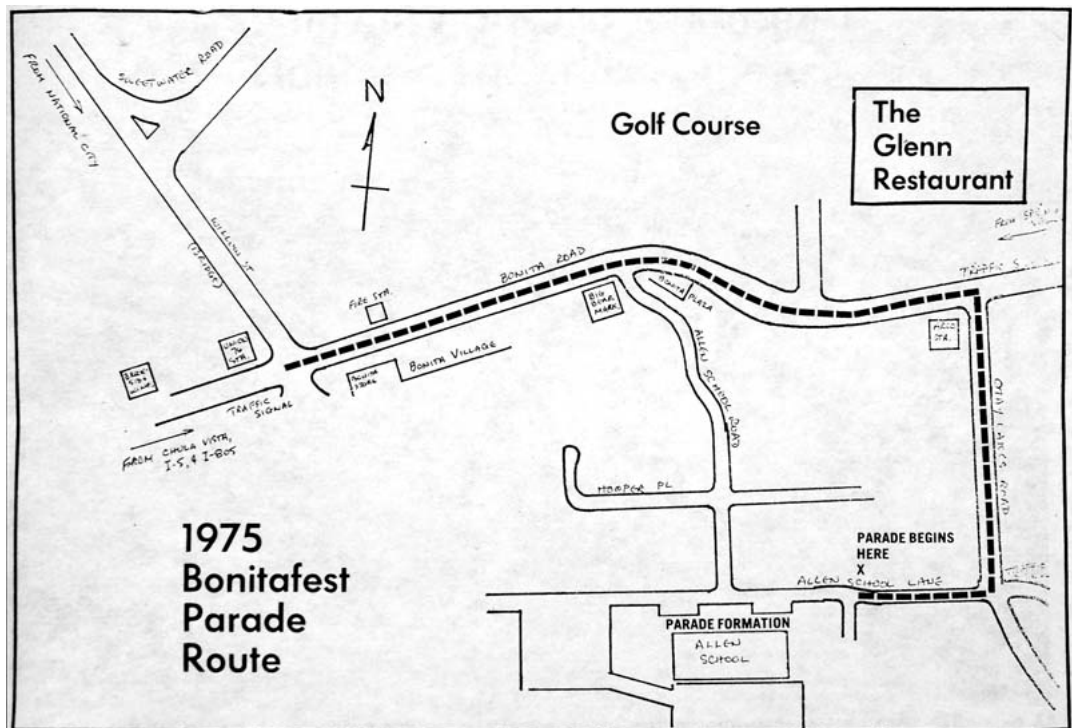
Special Bonitafest Editions of the *Bonita Post*, 1974. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1975/09/04 - Fred Higgins to be Bonitafest Grand Marshal in 1975. The Higgins family built a ranch house in the little valley to the south and north of what Corky McMillin's Bonita Willows. Fred's mother was one of the original members of the Sweetwater Woman's Club. Fred's father was on the two-man Board Education. Fred and Lucille now live on Siembre Street in Sunnyside midst the 15 acres they once planted as a lemon grove. Among Fred's business venture Dungaree that oldtimers remember as the place they bought jeans, shirts and tack. Jim DeBello and Jolene Esparza are Junior hosts for Bonitafest, both are seniors. Jim is the son of Mrs. John DeBello and the late Mr. DeBello. (*Bonita Post*, Sept. 4, 1975)



Grand Marshal and Junior Hosts in the *Bonita Post*, Sept. 4, 1975. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1975/09/04 - Deedie Shields and Claire Floto of the BBPA organized historical photo exhibit for Bonitafest. (*Bonita Post*, vol. 2)



Parade route in the *Bonita Post*, Sept. 25, 1975. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

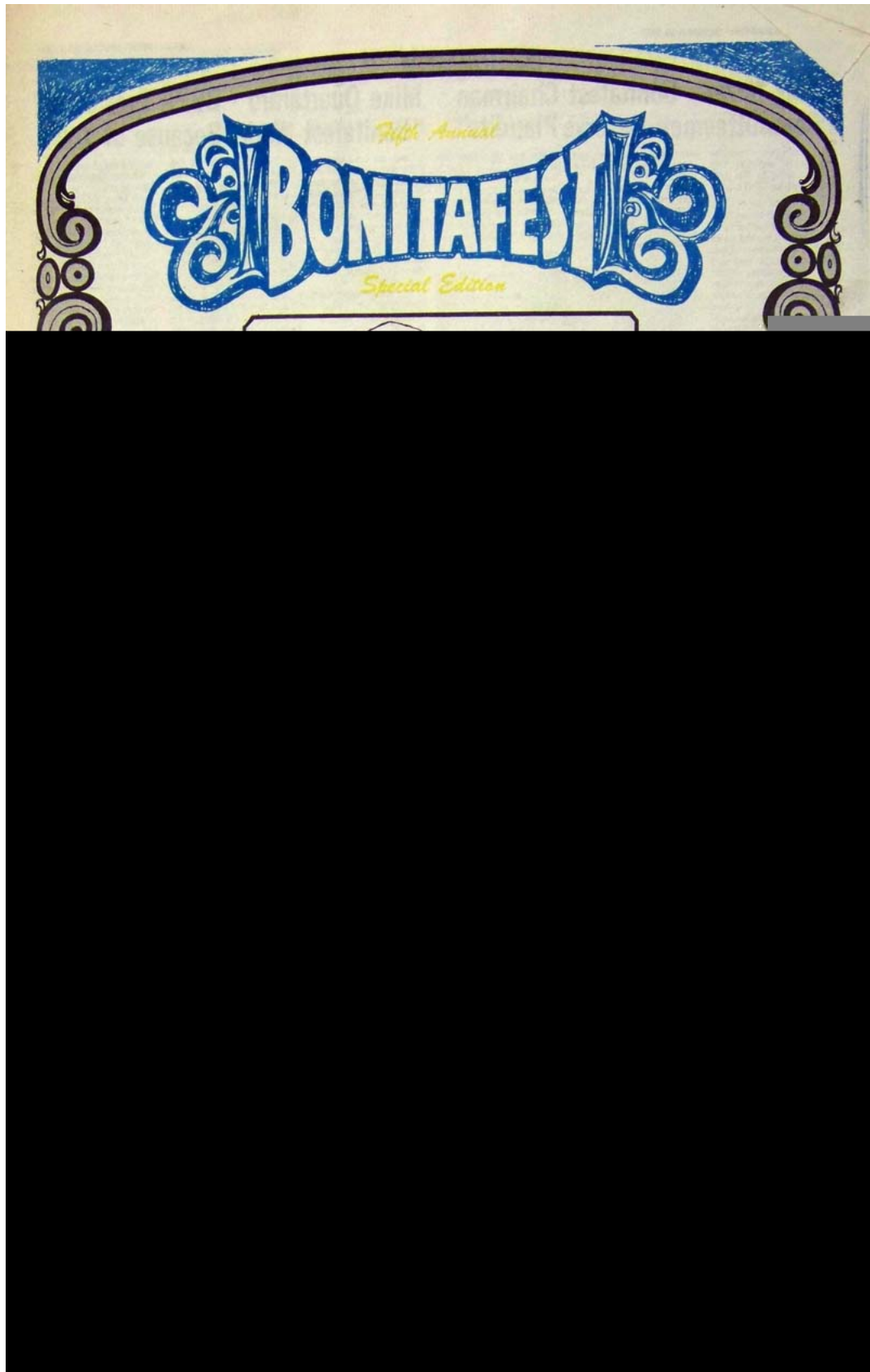
1976 - Josephine B. Loomis was Bonitafest Grand Marshal 1976. She was born in New York state, her father originally came from Ireland. She married Cha Bartell Loomis in 1918 and homesteaded in Colorado. She became one of the first women to cross the US on a motorcycle, from Los Angeles to NY. In 1944 she became Bonita's Postmaster, until 1965. She won a craft prize for her cut-out carved sign for the Sweetwater Woman's Club. She has 3 children including a daughter, Molly Gassaway, living on Orchard Hill Road, where Josephine built her house near her daughter. (Loomis Family vertical file, Bonita Museum)

1976 - Henry D. Holt was Bonitafest Grand Marshal in 1976. He taught mechanical engineering in Shanghai, China, in 1915, returned to US to fight in WWI. He returned to China 1920, married his 2nd wife, retired from teaching and moved to Chula Vista in 1950, lived in the house he built on Malito Dr., and joined the



Special Bonitafest Editions of the *Bonita Post*, 1976. Bonitafest Grand Marshals plant cypress trees donated by Lee and Dick Harvey of the Plant Shack Nursery. The students in the C are members of the Airline Service Class from SW College who served as Bonitafest hostesses. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1976/09/23 - Oldtimers at Bonitafest will ride in antique cars. Mike Brewer, is a 72 yr resident with his sister and borther in law Les Swanson. Mrs. Swanson here in 1904 and attended old Sunnyside School. Mr. Pleasant Wood has lived here 69 years, is brother-in-law to Mike Brewer. Mrs. Henry Grafton Chapma here as bride in 1921, moved to her present home in 1922, a house on Allen Road which has been a Valley fixture all these years. Mr. and Mrs. Roland F. de retired attorney with Mrs. deFere's father, Mr. Lucien Lebreton, a native of France but a resident here for years, proud of his age of 90 years. Mrs. Ruth Haul moved to Sunnyside as child 1908, was married 1919 at the Sunnyside church. Mrs. Bertha Mathews is longtime valley resident. Dr. James B. Norton came valley Dec. 24, 1905, graduated from Bonita Grammar School 1917 and NC high school 1921 and practiced dentistry in NC for 39 yrs and retired 1964. Mr. F. R. Scidmore are longtime residents. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Skene: he was born 1879 in England, immigrated to Canada 1896 and to US in 1901; she was 1886 in Oregon. Mr. Thomas S. Turner age 87 came to Bonita in 1935 and worked for the Sweetwater Fruit Company until retired 1958. Miss Mary Gordon Volkman lived here since 1930. Mrs. Butler Ward was past Grand Marshal 1974 was born in Bonita 1897. Mr. and Mrs. Vincent P. Whelan longtime reside retired attroney. Mr. and Mrs. Herman Wolfe born in the area and attended Sweetwater HS and later in charge of Sweetwater HS District Transportation for Mr. and Mrs. S. G. Litchfield, retired realtor, moved into house built in 1907 by the father of Mrs. Ward. (*Bonita Post*, vol. 3)



Special Bonitafest Edition of the *Bonita Post*, 1977. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

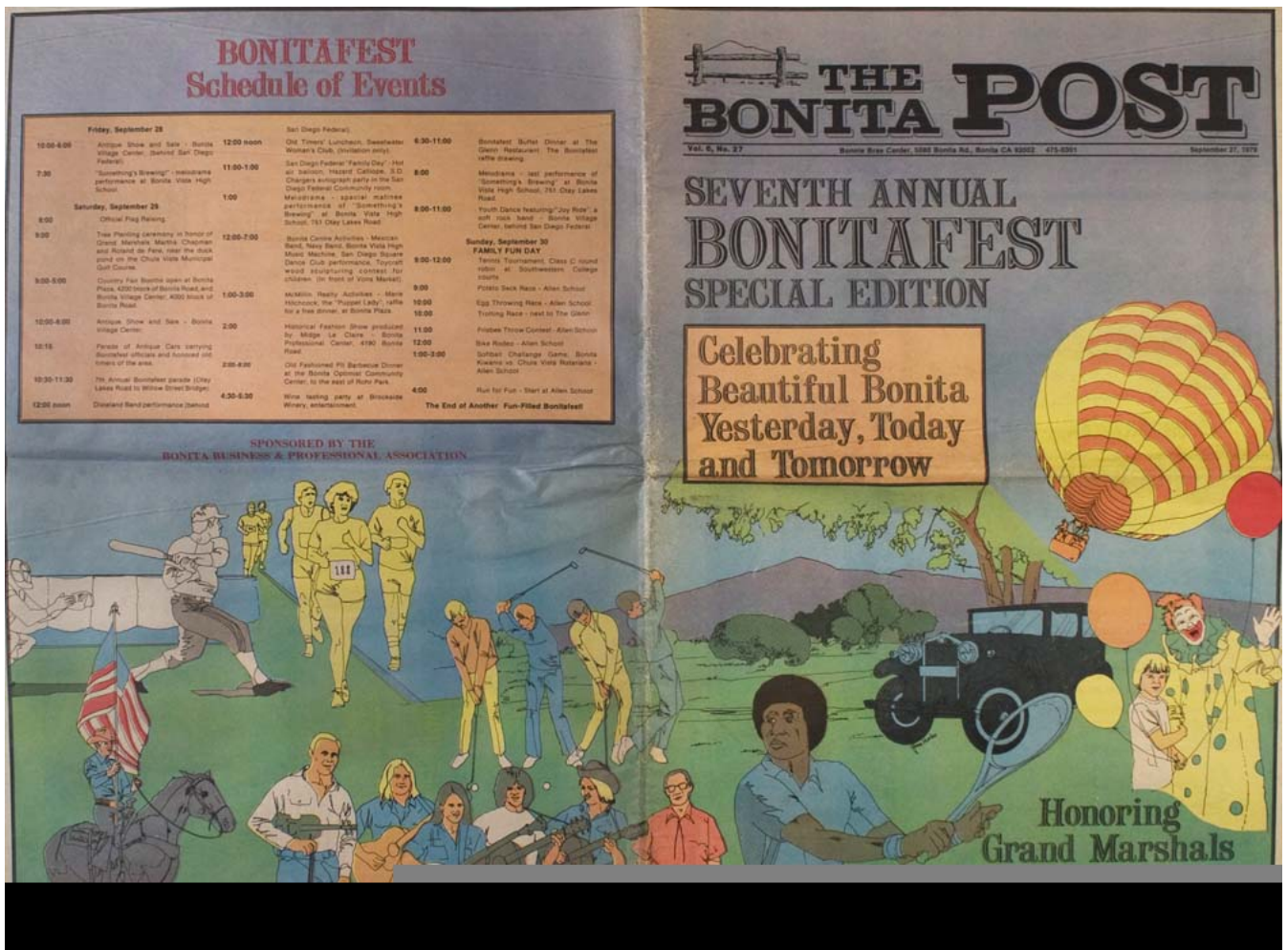
1977/09/29 - Pat Spies is Bonitafest Grand Marshal for 1977. She moved into her house in 1948 in Allen School area. Was a charter member of SVCA. Big battles were attempt to defeat the attempted annexation of Bonita-Sunnyside to the Otay Mesa Fire District; blocking the Chula Vista Post Office from consce the Bonita area, thus maintaining Bonita's postmark and the areas integrating as a separate settlement; thwarting (at least lor the time being) the controversia Miguel project; the battle to prevent Highway 54 from being built right through the middle of the Valley; tying up the proposed National City-May Co. shop center project which would destroy the Bonita Golf Course area and cause pollution in the Valley. The last of these battles is going strong after 7 years of co appearances, injunctions, appeals, and public hearings. In Feb. of this year, Mrs. Spies and the SVCA sent a letter to the County Board of Supervisors asking board's help in protecting some 9.8 acres of the area question. Attorney Bill Canon, now in his second year as president of the SVCA and Chairman of the E

Committee of the Sweetwater Planning Group, said, "Pat Spies has done far more than anyone else to help the Valley keep its rural appeal. She is Bonita's s board. She has given tremendous amounts of time and effort, something that very few people have done." (*Bonta Post*, Sept. 29, 1977) - [see article](#)



Bonitafest melodrama "Thin Skins and Hayseeds" was written and produced in 1978 by Max Branscomb and Loren Lindsay Tarantino. In this photo, David Harris played pioneer father Lansley, and the Lansley family was played by Lisa Mercier and Cora Powell and unidentified boy. (Photo from Max Branscomb)

1978 - The Bonitafest melodrama "Thin Skins and Hayseeds" written and produced by Max Branscomb with Loren Lindsey Tarantino brought Bonita history to life. It was inspired by the lives of Bonita pioneers Alfred Lansley, Fred Higgins, Mary Allen Ward, and others. In this 1978 photo, David Harris played pioneer father Lansley, and the Lansley family was played by Lisa Mercier and Cora Powell, with unidentified boy at right. Richard Pena and Zula Pena ride in the open wagon in the Bonita Museum in the Bonitafest parade. Richard helped Max Branscomb do the research for his melodrama by bringing together a group of Old-Timers and sharing their stories to Max. The melodrama is the longest-running theater production in San Diego history, performed every year since 1978. Added in 1978, the Bonita Wine Tasting with dinner and entertainment was a popular addition. Nan Meyers, holding the microphone, was the host for 1980 dinner. Her husband Ed Meyers wore the black hat and Jan Taipale plays guitar. Local merchants and organizations set up booths along Bonita Road selling arts, crafts, plants and food to the visitors during the 1980 Bonitafest. Many local school and church groups raised money for special events as the Ski Club Bake Sale booth shows. Started by Pat and Ed Dolan in 1979, the Orange Crate Derby was a very popular addition to Bonitafest. Local boys and girls built their cars under strict rules of weight and steering and raced down the hills of Bonita. The participants, with the winners at the front, participated in the 1993 Bonitafest parade. (Schoenherr, *Bonita*, 2010.)



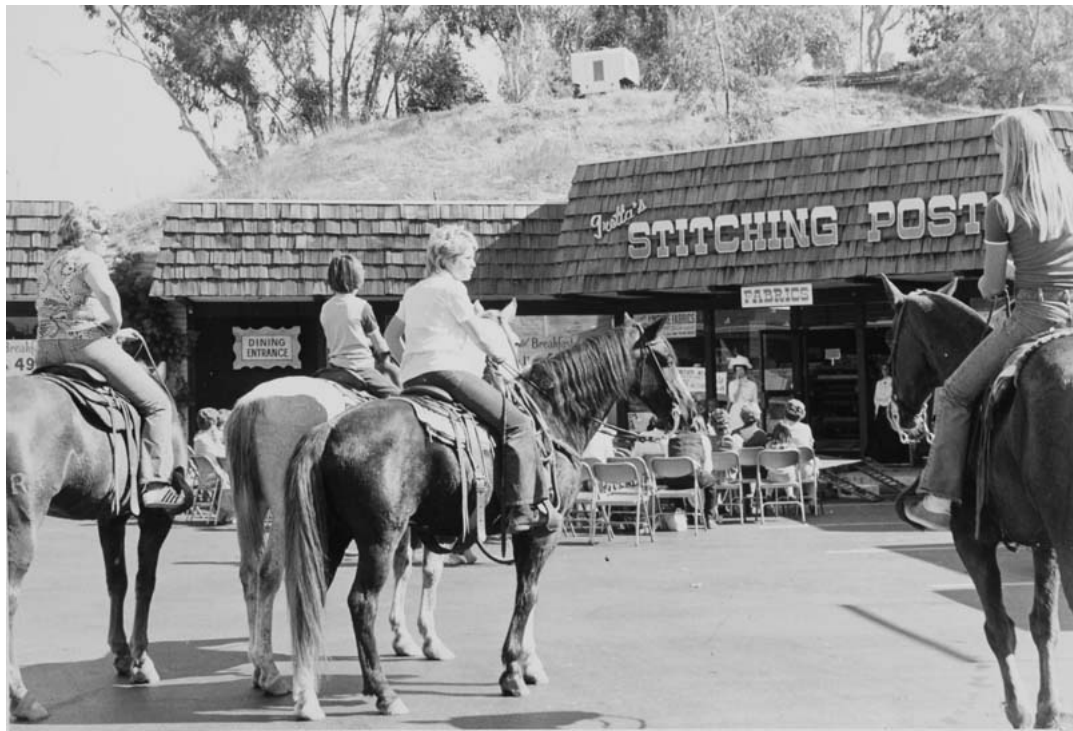
Special Bonitafest Edition of the *Bonita Post*, 1979. (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1979/09/27 - Al Monahan was selected as 1979 Bonitafest Host, has been involved in the planning of all Bonitafests since the first in Sept 1973. He was born in Canada, moved to Idaho when he was 6, after high school moved to Seattle, worked in Boeing factory, was Navy pilot in WWII, married June Erickson in 1951 in Idaho. He was one of the Navy's first helicopter pilots, flew evac in Korea and Vietnam, was commander of air group in 1962, retired in 1971 As Capt Monahan, formed a financial firm called "Private Ledger" that grew to 200 agents. Al's favorite events in Bonitafests have been Old Timers Luncheon and melodrama. (*Bonita Post*, vol. 6)

1979/09/27 - Emily Ritter selected as 1979 Bonitafest Hostess. She was born in Georgia, was army nurse in WWII, married Marine pilot Lee Ritter, have raised children, when Lee retired from marines Emily bought the Village Togs in 1971, and founded Bonita Bath in 1975 with Betty Lou Lewis, but now has sold and works part time as sales rep for Gertrud Davenport wholesaler. She founded the BBPA in 1971 when she felt the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce was representing Bonita businesses. In 1976 she ran for City Council. (*Bonita Post*, vol. 6)

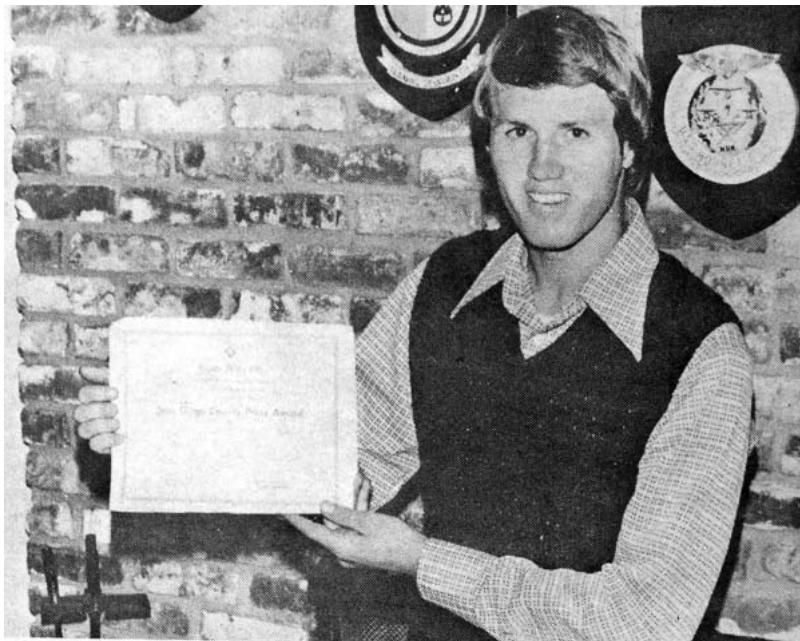
1979/12/13 - Rick Diaz is local song writer and singer, has cut a new album, includes song "Bonita" recorded during the 1978 Bonitafest. He is an avid horse rider, boards two horses at the Sunnyside Stock Farm, and he rides with the well-known "Hole-in-the-Wall Gang." (*Bonita Post*, vol. 6)

1979 - Bonitafest 1979 Grand Marshals will be Martha Chapman and Roland DeFere. Martha Chapman was born in Rochester NY in 1897, became school teacher, moved to Wyoming in the 1910s, met Grafton Chapman, they came to California Sept. 1921 because of a job at the fruit company, and were married by Mar father, Lutheran minister Rev. Dr. Alpeter. They built their home on Allen School Road in 1922, a classic example of California redwood. Grafton was a major figure in WWI, and was an AF officer in WWII who commanded the secret base on Mojave Desert where first American jet planes were developed and tested. He witnessed the flights of the first three jets, and spent several years living on the base. Grafton later worked on the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star jet and then served in the Korean War, and died 1970. Son Robert lives in Hawaii with family of 5 children. Martha was member of SVCA. (*Bonita Post*, Sept. 27, 1979)



Bonitafest 1973 (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1980/10/12 - Max Branscomb wrote both the music and the script for 'A Matter of Time.' The 25-year-old Paradise Hills resident just completed a journalism major at San Diego State University and is working on his master's degree in mass communication. He plans to write next year's Bonitafest plays, and, he said, to keep writing plays until people start throwing tomatoes. Branscomb recently left the Bonita Post where he had been a reporter since age 15, to devote his energies to his school. (*Imperial Beach Star-News*, Oct. 12, 1980)



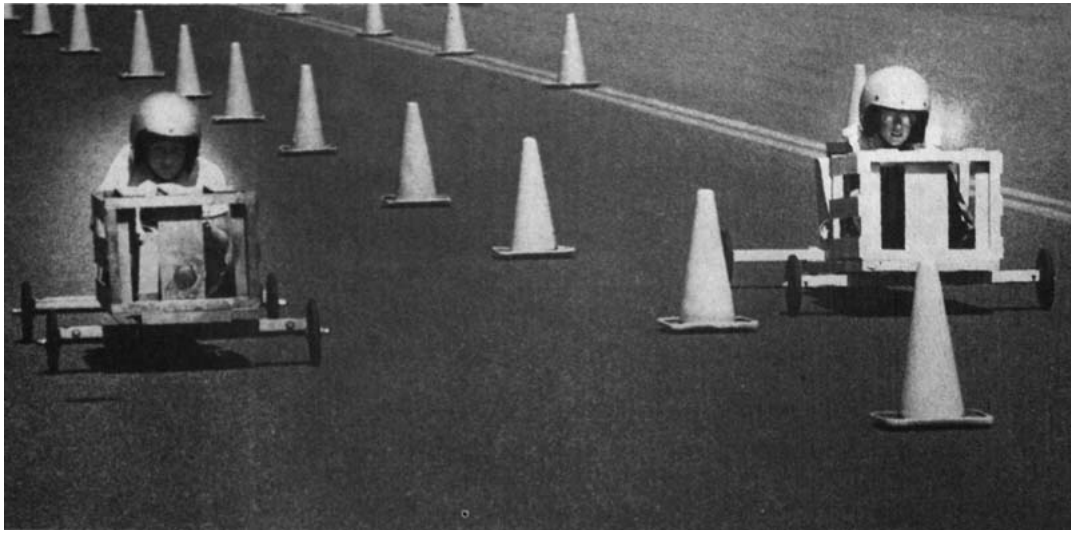
Bonita Post sportswriter Max Branscomb won a County Press Award when he was a senior at Bonita Vista High School. His writing skills and love of Bonita history has contributed to the authorship of the Bonitafest melodrama from 1978 to the present. (*Bonita Post*, June 6, 1975)

1981 - Bonitafest 1981 - Bonita & Professional Association Community Volunteers Capt. and Mrs. Charles B. Hamilton, founders of the C.B. & Ardell Han Scholarship Fund. Ardell Hamilton is wearing a Bonitafest button. (Bonita Museum)



Bonitafest 1980 (Photo from the Bonita Museum)

1983/09/18 - Bonitafest '83 got off to something of a slow start this year and veterans of the Sweetwater Valley's annual celebration were getting more than a little nervous. Planning and organization which usually starts in February or March was still dangling as spring flowers were beginning to blossom, and at least a couple of Bonitafest aficionados were grimly worried about the possibility of "Bonitaflop." No one had yet stepped forward to take the weighty position of Bonitafest Chairman, and the natives were getting restless. Enter Don Glover, a "Johnny Come Lately" to Bonita who had only recently purchased the Jack-in-the-Box on Bonita Road. Without fully understanding what he was getting himself into, he volunteered to lead the stalled Bonitafest '83. "I guess they figured they could sucker the new kid on the block into the job because he wouldn't know how hard a job it is," Glover joked. "But I've enjoyed every minute I've spent working on Bonitafest, it's really a lot of fun." Glover's task is to coordinate about two dozen events and the scores of volunteers which form the heart and soul of the Bonita Committee. The committee chairmen and volunteers meet every Tuesday at 7:30 a.m. to brief each other on the progress of their respective tasks. At the head of the table sit Don Glover and advisor Larry LaTour, chairman of last year's Bonitafest, to make suggestions and keep things running smoothly. "I've heard that past Bonitafests were dropped, but this year is falling into place very nicely," Glover said. "Everybody who works on the various activities are bright people who know what they're doing. Sometimes I feel that Bonitafest really just runs itself." Bonitafest '82 was Glover's first glimpse of the Sweetwater Valley's annual celebration, and a hit-and-run at that. "I didn't get to see too much of it last year because I was working the rush at Jack-in-the-Box," he explained. "A lot of this will be new to me, even though I'm beginning to feel pretty familiar with some of the events because we spend so much time discussing them and planning them. I'm anxious to see some of the activities for the first time." Glover's inexperience has not handicapped his ability to run Bonitafest '83, co-workers say. "Don has good fundamental management skills which he applies at Jack-in-the-Box and Bonitafest," said volunteer Margaret Frank. "He knows how to run things and how to delegate authority. He lets people do what they're best at without meddling too much." Glover is something of an oddity in that he does not live in the immediate area. He commutes from Rancho Bernardo to his Bonita restaurant and his new store at 4th and C in Chula Vista, and crawls out of bed at 5 a.m. for those "rooster racing" earlier morning Bonitafest meetings. Though the Bonitafest parade and the booths won't flood Bonita Road until Oct. 1, Bonitafest is already "underway," Glover said. "It's not a weekend anymore," he explained, "It's actually a month of events and activities. The Fun Run cosponsored by the YMCA already went off smoothly, and the golf tournament is underway. The drama production. We already have a full head of steam built up by the time Oct. 1 comes around. Local merchants need to work more closely together," Glover said, "to unite the community. The Bonitafest and the BBPA (Bonita Business and Professional Association) have made some real progress in bringing the merchants and the community together, but there is still much that hasn't been done," he said. Civic minded volunteers are another "key" to the Bonitafest, stated Glover. "I'm impressed by the number of people who work on the Bonitafest who do not own homes in the valley," he said. "These are people who do not profit at all from Bonitafest in a business sense, but who contribute their time and talents to the community. We have a group of private citizens like Mary Jane Pye, Diane Cousino, Kirk and Pat Dolan, Margaret Frank, Betty Poselli and Al Monahan, just to name a few who play indispensable roles in putting this thing together." Large businesses and companies have shown more interest in the Bonitafest recently, Glover said, and have provided funding and manpower needed for the expanding list of activities and events. "The smaller stores were carrying the whole Bonitafest on their backs for years," he pointed out. "We need the big guys to pitch in a little if we want to keep improving. I'd like to publicly thank The Star-News for all the help and support they've given to the Bonitafest this year. They've given us a small army of helpers and they've agreed to sponsor the parade." Glover said he "can't wait" to be with his wife, Cathy, 7-year-old son, Jeff, and 4-year-old daughter, Kristin, to see their first Bonitafest. "Jeff's racing in the Orange Crate Derby this year, so I can't miss," he said with a grin. "In fact, I don't want to miss anything." (*The Imperial Beach Star-News*, Sept. 18, 1983)



Chaz Abbott, 8, and Kristen Foster, 11, head down Briarwood Road in Bonita during the Bonitafest's Orange Crate Derby yesterday. The race is just one of a host of activities sponsored by the Bonitafest committee. (*The Imperial Beach Star-News*, Sept. 25, 1983)

1983/10/06 - "Bonita Bonitafest rediscovers its roots in 1983" by Max Branscomb. The kids on the bikes decorated with colorful streamers were holding the heavenward and bracing for the worst. The girl in the sequined tights had their jackets draped over their shoulders to fend off the breeze. The thousands lined up on Briarwood Road waiting for the Bonitafest '83 parade to get underway were looking skyward. "Please don't let it rain on our parade," murmured parade chairperson Glen Coleman as she directed the antique cars carrying the VIPs to their starting places. Coleman seemed to strike a compromise with the threatening skies as she made her preparations. It did rain on the Bonitafest parade, but not hard enough to wash away the smiles from the faces of the participants and the viewers. This year's Bonitafest had a strangely nostalgic flavor, which summoned memories of the more homespun celebrations from a time when the Bonita Road parade route ended with pastures full of grazing horses. After years of increasing commercialization, Bonitafest rediscovered its roots and its intimate charm. The marching bands from Bonita Vista High and BV Junior High were there, proudly strutting down the center of town with the pomp and drill one would expect to find in a parade. This was a people's parade, too, with an accessibility and innocence established that was refreshing. A beaming mother pushed her two babies painted with clown makeup in a two-seater stroller. The orange crate derby winners waved from their cars as their dads pushed them along with broomsticks and their trophies acted as their ornaments. The Cub Scouts grinned toothy grins and gave crisp two-fingered salutes to whoever waved. All of the traditional Bonitafest entries were there, including the scruffy "Hole in the Wail Gang" pointed rifles skyward and chewed stumps of cigars as their horses trotted by. Grey-haired gentlemen in string ties drove the spotless classic automobiles at a snail's pace. A barbershop quartet hit every harmony gracefully as it passed, and a group of young people played guitar and sang from the back of a flatbed. "This was a marvelous parade," said 89-year-old Grand Marshal Julia Scidmore. "It was really a lot of fun. I've never seen so many people having so much fun." After the parade, the crowds left the curbs and milled around the scores of booths scattered throughout the parking lots of Bonita's shopping centers. Kids bought cotton candy that made their tongues turn blue, while their parents chewed on chili dogs, bagels, and soft pretzels. Craftsmen offered everything from T-shirts and belt buckles to quilts and lace dresses. From the makeshift stages came the sounds of music, dancing, and entertainment of several covers. The Bonita Vista Music Machine gave its premier 1983-84 performance. Sherri Barker led a troupe of celebrity impersonators with her no-holds-barred salute to Minelli. Ruben Padiila kept an audience of youngsters riveted with his magic act. Elsewhere, Bonita's senior citizens were being honored at the sentimental Timers luncheon, an annual meeting of one of the area's most exclusive clubs. As the afternoon marched on, the clouds thinned away and people drifted over to a wine tasting party at the Bonita Professional Center and the pit barbecue at the scenic Bonita Optimist Club. The sun was sliding from the sky and the streets were loading their station wagons, but Bonitafest Saturday was far from over. The sun had just gone down as the curtain came up on the final Bonita performance, "Fourth and Goal," the Bonitafest Drama Production. Crew members were scurrying about busily setting up extra chairs for the overflow crowd that had packed the Bonita Vista High School's music drama building for the final rousing show. The cast of actors was tired before the show began but caught fire from the enthusiastic crowd. On the other side of the campus, the Bonitafest Youth Dance returned this year after a conspicuous absence. It was somewhat less raucous event this year as a polished DJ replaced the rock bands of the previous years. Some of the young people who attended said they preferred the five bands, but were glad to settle for any source. As Bonitafest continues to grow and add new events, the celebration is spilling into the weeks preceding and following Bonitafest Saturday. Sunday a 30-mile bicycle tour and 10-mile fun ride will snake through the valley. (*The Imperial Beach Star-News*, Oct. 6, 1983)



Wild West Bonitafest 1985 plate showing the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire truck of 1954. (Bonita Museum)

1985 - Dozens of talented local actors, singers, and artists received either their start or a boost from Bonitafest Drama Productions. Tim Evans went on to win prestigious American Community Theater award as Best Actor in a Musical last year for his role as "Fagin" in the Scripps Ranch Community Theatre's production "Oliver!" After turning professional he starred in the just-concluded run of "No Sex Please, We're British" at the Fiesta Dinner Theater, and has been in an TV video. Jay Ayers, Susan Houston, Beau Houston, Maxine Holtman, Tricia Dawe, Danee Fowler, Tracy Gibbs, Pete Cooke, Matt Wilson, Cora Powell, Debbi Donna Martin, Joe Sutton, David Harris, and Wendy Welch are among the Bonitafest alumni who have made a mark on San Diego County drama as perform designers, or musicians. Bonitafest '85 will feature a revival of "Thinskins and Hayseeds" and a return to the original tent concept of 1978. (All subsequent I shows have been performed at the theater at Bonita Vista High School) The new version of the show is a bit longer and has been augmented with even more Sweetwater Valley history. Some of the popular more popular characters from the original have been better developed, and four new songs have been added. entirely new staging of the show is in the works, the general level of the performing talent is higher. The local color and rustic charm of the original "Think Hayseeds" remains intact, however, as does the basic conflicts of man versus the elements, and undying love. The show runs October 2-6 in the tent erected intersection of Otay Lakes Road and Bonita Road in Bonita.. (*Bonita Style*, Oct. 1985)



Bonitafest crowds in 1980. (Bonita Museum)

1986/10 - The Grand Marshal of the Bonitafest Parade, the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a person in the community by the Bonitafest committee year to the Wilson family - Richard and Marian Wilson and their two sons, David F. ("Bud") and Don. A third son, Dick, lives in Yuma, Arizona. Richard, o family members, was born in Alpena, Michigan, in 1913, and has lived in Bonita-Chula Vista since 1928. He met his wife, Marian, after spotting her in a Sv

High School play, on a blind date arranged by his brother Bob, who later became the area congressman. Marian was the first female Associated Student Body president of Sweetwater High School, and has lived in Bonita since 1920. Dick and Marian built their first home in 1939, on an acre behind what is now Vons supermarket, growing vegetables where Vons now sits. Dick and Marian have owned several businesses, including Wilson's Ice Cream at 3rd and Davidson Vista, which moved to F Street west of 3rd Avenue in 1946 and became the "in" place for young people in the forties. They sold it in 1950 and went into the business in 1951. Wilson and Cox Insurance is now run by son "Bud" Wilson, 47, who serves on the Chula Vista Community Hospital Board, the Board of Independent Insurance Agents of America. He has served on the Advisory Board of the Salvation Army with his wife, Sandra, and was president of the Jaycees and a member of the Rotary Club. Don, 46, is construction coordinator for Home Federal Savings and Loan and oversees new construction and remodeling of brick offices, including the Bonita branch. Archery, hunting, and salt-water fishing occupy his free time. (Bonita Style Sept. 1986) Bud Wilson - was born and raised in Bonita, has business interests in Chula Vista, and was recently recognized for his involvement in the community when honored as Bonitafest Grand Marshal known in state and national insurance circles, Wilson, of Wilson and Cox Insurance in Chula Vista, is on the national board of Independent Insurance Agent America and is past-president of the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers Association of California. On the local level he serves on the Chula Vista Community Hospital Board, and has served on the Advisory Board of the Salvation Army with his wife Sandra, and was president of the Jaycees and a member of the Rotary Club. As a young man with an uncle who was a Congressman (former Rep. Bob Wilson), Bud Wilson's interest in politics eventually led him to try for office when he ran against Tom Hamilton, and lost, for Mayor of Chula Vista. Wilson's roots run deep in the Bonita-Chula Vista area and he is likely to continue to influence in its development. (Bonita Style, Oct. 1986)



Bonitafest crowds in 1984. (Bonita Museum)

1987 - The Bonita Historical Museum had its start in September of 1987. This was just prior to the community celebration of Bonitafest of that year. Captain Yokley of the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Department and the then-president of the Bonita Business and Professional Association, Carol Hammond, were collecting memorabilia for the historical display at a local bank, something which had been done in each year past. When told that the bank space was not available, they looked around for a substitute location. They were rescued by Phil Berdeski, of the Berdeski Investment Corporation, who provided them with a storefront in the B Village Shopping Center. The original intent was to remain open only during the duration of the two days of Bonitafest. Yokley and Hammond had been joined in their opening by John Rojas of the Chula Vista Historical Society and more material, particularly photographs, were exhibited, much to the delight of those visiting the space. Due to its popularity and to the generosity of Berdeski Investments, who continued to donate the space, the museum remained open after Bonitafest. It was changed from the Bonitafest Museum to the Bonita Museum and volunteers were recruited to act as helpers and docents. Richard and Zula Pena took over the directorship of the museum and with the able help of devoted volunteer have staged different themes over the years, have opened its doors twice a week, and hosted large groups of people at receptions and open houses. The museum committee has operated under the direct auspices of the Bonita Business and Professional Association, its chief sponsor. It also receives some financial aid from the San Diego County Community Enhancement Funds and from its own fund raising. Individuals have contributed material as well as modest financial returns for the betterment of the museum. The museum has proven itself to be a good source of education, a center for research, and has also provided some entertainment. Because of its approval by the community, those closest to it are dedicated to its continuation and betterment. (Chula Vista Historical Society. Family, Friends, and Homes, 1991.)



Richard Pena and Zula Pena ride in the 1997 Bonitafest parade. (Bonita Museum)

1995/06/21 - The oft-threatened Bonitafest has been rescued again, this time for good, promised the sponsoring Bonita Business and Professional Association. The latest rescue came in the form of \$2,500 which several companies have pledged to help cover the estimated \$7,500 cost of the Sept. 30 event, said real estate developer Jeff Phair. More good news for a revised Bonitafest came this week with the word that owners of the Vons shopping center at Bonita Road and Otter Road had reversed their previous decision to deny use of their parking lot for the 22-year-old festival. Center owners had opted out of the festival this year as named in a lawsuit filed by a performer injured in the 1993 Bonitafest. The suit cost the Bonita Business and Professional Association \$5,000 as their share of it and prompted the association in May to cancel the 1995 event. A groundswell of public support, including backing from Mayor Shirley Horton, prompted the association to resurrect the 1995 festival. Horton lives in Bonita and is a graduate of Bonita Vista High School. More money will be raised at a July 8 Wild West Hoedown at the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Station at 4900 Bonita Road, Hamilton said. (*San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 21, 1995)



Winchester Widows ride by the La Bonita condos in the 1997 Bonitafest parade. (Photo from Max Branscomb)



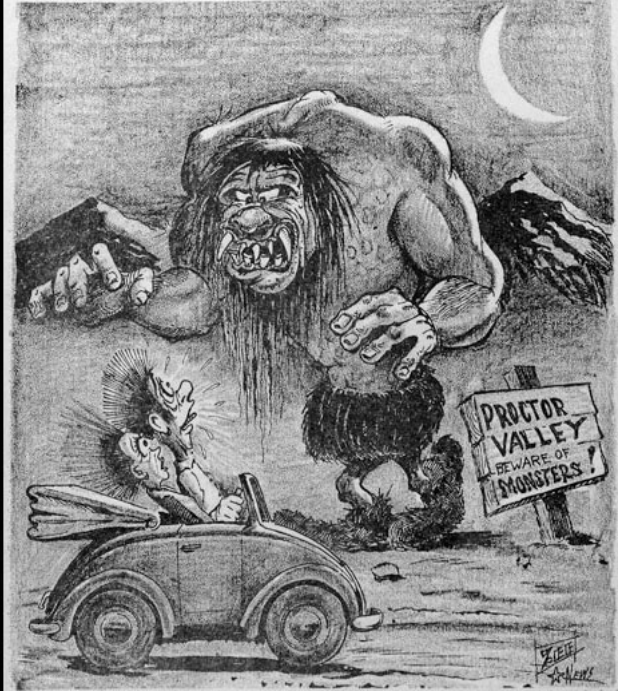
Emily Ritter waves at the 1997 Bonitafest parade. (Photo from Max Branscomb)



Diane Cousino rides in red Grand Marshal car in the 1997 Bonitafest parade. (Photo from Max Branscomb)

1998/09/18 BONITAFEST MELODRAMA - Bonita playwright Max Branscomb and his cast of 60 will take on the unpopular tollway in the musical "The F the Proctor Valley Monster," in the 21st Annual Bonitafest Melodrama. The show will run September 23-26 and October 2-3 at the Bonita Vista High School. All shows begin at 7:30 pm. Tickets are \$5 and are reserved by calling 421-9438. Veteran performers Tim Evans, Carl Fogg, Jr., Dean Sipe and Melody Gor a talented cast. The "Return of the Proctor Valley Monster" will open September 23 with a special Picnic On The Green party at Bonita Vista High School. / catered by the Jalapeño Grill will be served at 6 p.m. Tickets for dinner and show are only \$12.50. (La Prensa, September 18, 1998)

Proctor Valley monster: Is it a hoax or real creature?



Proctor Valley monster illustration (Chula Vista Star-News)

1998/09/18 - Blossoming singer/songwriter Jessica Lerner has played a star for years at the San Diego Old Globe Theater and San Diego Repertory Theater. She sang "The Star Spangled Banner" as an 8 year old at Qualcomm Stadium and has performed at Padre's games ever since. She began piano lessons at 8 at SoC College and studied voice with Joni Wilson. That same year she debuted in her first musical, "The Return of the Proctor Valley Monster," a Bonitafest Melodrama. She opposed the construction of the 125 Tollway. She was a featured soloist in the show that included many of the region's best musical theatre performers. (*South County College Sun*, Dec. 12, 2011)

Bonitafest crowds in 1993. (Bonita Museum)

2003/08/24 - Local playwright and Southwestern College journalism instructor Max Branscomb has most publicly resurrected the legend with his musical comedy "The Return of the Proctor Valley Monster," which has been performed as part of Bonitafest, a celebration of history and community. Occasionally, people seek the monster, just as they look for ghosts in Old Town or munchkin houses in La Jolla. Sometimes, it's a car full of teenagers looking to scare themselves. Other times, it's a band of sexagenarians such as Harmon Harris and his buddies. They are geocachers - folks who use GPS devices to find caches hidden by hobbyists - and they recently went to Proctor Valley with flashlights and active imaginations. These caches are everywhere. The Proctor Valley expedition has a special to commend it, but when you're pursuing a second childhood, a good monster story helps stir the adventure. Even Bud Wilson, a longtime local and insurance businessman who downplays the myth, likes to play the game. "First of all, it's not true that I am the Proctor Valley Monster," Wilson cracked when asked about the legend. He remembers the valley as the place he paid a nickel to ride calves rodeo-style. But a monster out there? Not that he remembers. "It is true that there was a monster who lived under the Bonita Bridge," Wilson said. But that's another monster. And that's another story. (*The San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 24, 2003)

Bonitafest hayride in 1997. (Bonita Museum)

2005 - The Bonita Museum and Cultural Center started out as an historical photograph exhibit for Bonitafest. Through the generosity of the community, the Chula Vista and the county of San Diego, the Museum moved into a new building adjacent to the new Bonita Sunnyside library in 2005. The Bonita Museum moved into a new building that was a joint project of the County of San Diego, City of Chula Vista, and the Museum with \$500,000 in donations from the local community. (Schoenherr, *Bonita*, 2010,)

The dinosaurs of Jerry Gauss still reside along Bonita Road.

2008/05/10 - "Dinosaurs rule over South Bay," by Michelle Ganon. Scientists say dinosaurs are extinct, but Bonita residents know better. Their Mesozoic Era population will increase to three on May 26, when Glen Abbey Memorial Park & Mortuary officially celebrates the installation of Dinosaurous in an area of known as The Land of Nod. The 9-foot-tall, 22-foot-long creature made by local artist Kelly Tracy from donated steel tubing, stucco mesh, rebar, polyurethane and rubber will reside just a half-mile from Bonita's other resident dinosaurs, Rumbi and Rangui. The story of the three sculptures intertwines, although the artists who shaped them never met. Nearly 50 years ago, Jerry Gauss, a 15-year-old student at Hilltop High School, created Rumbi and Rangui as a surprise anniversary gift for his parents. He called them glarfs, for dwarf dinosaurs. Rumbi and Rangui's visibility in the family's yard at the corner of Sweetwater and Valley roads led residents to call the spot Dinosaur Hill. Although he planned to create more, Gauss died from injuries sustained in a car accident at age 19. "It was a real tragedy," Tracy said. "Jerry had a wonderful style and great ideas. He could have done so much more." Time passed. The glarfs disappeared from Bonita in 1969 when the Gauss family relocated to Chula Vista. They were rediscovered 28 years later when Chula Vista police Lt. Tom Everett, a Bonita native, spotted them at the

new home during an early-morning patrol. Everett arranged to move the glarfs back to a prominent Bonita location, this time at the entrance of the Bonita V Shopping Center. Only Rumbi survived the trip, but the story inspired Max Branscomb, a professor of journalism at Southwestern College, to write "When I Roamed the Valley," a musical that has been performed several times at the annual Bonitafest community celebration. Then, in 2004, Rumbi's head fell off. ' a television news story about the damaged dinosaur and knew he had to help. "The glarfs are part of Bonita's history. Everyone loves them," he said. "I volu fix Rumbi, the yellow glarf, and then was asked to reproduce Rangui, the blue one. The new Rangui is not identical to the old, but it is a fairly close match." work on the glarfs led to the Dinosaurous commission. Vanessa Chicca, Glen Abbey's community service counselor, who has written a children's book about glarfs, saw Tracy working on Rangui and realized that a dinosaur sculpture might enhance the area of the memorial park for infants and children. Daniel Gal general manager, said, "We wanted an appropriate feature element to honor the spirit of children. The bereavement process is a journey, and we're supporting this case, through the artist's vision." Tracy began work on his sculpture eight months ago. Although he planned to make Dinosaurous 5 feet tall by 9 feet lo intervened. A storm caused a large pepper tree in Tracy's front yard to fall and destroy part of a chain-link fence so he recycled the damaged top rail. It now Dinosaurous its shape, from the tip of its nose to the tip of its tail. "I like to use reclaimed and recycled materials when I can," Tracy said. Nancy Gauss Will original artist's younger sister, who lives in Northern California, was happy to hear about Tracy's project for Glen Abbey. "My brother had started a third gla flying bird, that he never finished," she said. "It's nice that Kelly fixed Rumbi and Rangui, and that he has made another dinosaur." Tracy feels that Gauss ha him find new purpose with his art. "Working with the glarfs and seeing how much the community appreciated my efforts restoring and re-creating Jerry's we changed me," he said. As Branscomb said, "Kelly and Jerry would have been good friends. With Dinosaurous, Kelly is honoring Jerry in a wonderful way." *Diego Union-Tribune*, May 10, 2008)

Bonitafest crowds in 1984. (Bonita Museum)

2014/05/27 - After more than 40 years, the Wild West Bonitafest is now history. The Bonita Business and Professional Association has voted to disband, by just 15 of its 50 members, U-T San Diego reports. The Association indicates the vote was uncontested, raising questions over what the apparently absent ma members think about the decision to permanently cancel Bonitafest and other community events sponsored by the group. Carri Long-Fernandez, president o association, said it was a financial decision but did not divulge details. Memorabilia from the event, along with remaining reserves, will be donated to the Bc Museum and Cultural Center. The event, founded in 1973, featured a parade, melodrama, entertainers, crafts, games, exhibit booths, refreshments, kids' zone freestyle motocross show. The melodrama's director has said he plans to continue writing scripts in hopes of someday staging more shows. This message wa on the Bonita Business and Professional Association's Facebook page: "Dissolving the BBPA was a heart wrenching decision to make and was necessitated change in demographics, manpower, membership, and financial support. We had to face the stark reality that we were no longer able to continue with busine usual. "We will update the BBPA and Bonitafest pages as we have more information on what's to come. In the meantime, the Board will continue to work w counsel to ensure that all obligations are met and that we're able to leave a lasting legacy for the Bonita community." The disbanded organization also organi community events, including a holiday tree-lighting and chili cook-off each year, plus awarded scholarships to local deserving students. The organization's F page had not been updated in weeks prior to the cancellation notice. It is unclear why the group voted to disband, like the San Diego Opera, without notifyin of its financial woes in order to make a concerted effort to alert the public that help was needed to save the organization. (*East County Magazine*, May 27, 2014)

Bonitafest soap box derby 1993. (Bonita Museum)

2014/07/12 - "Bonitafest will go on," by Robert Moreno. The biggest community event in Bonita will get smaller. Southwestern College professor Max Bra who spearheaded a community effort to salvage Bonitafest, said the 42nd annual Bonitafest will happen this year. "Bonitafest is a go," he said. Unlike previc where Bonitafest was an all-day affair, the 2014 Bonitafest will be spread out over five days and on a much smaller financial scale. Bonitafest kicks off Aug will partner with the Chula Vista Live Steamers in providing train rides to children from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Day two of Bonitafest takes place Sept. 12, with t Twilight Trail at the Chula Vista Municipal Golf Course. Branscomb said the parade will feature children on horses and bicycles, and also people carrying g to light up the night. "That's the way we are going to do our parade," Branscomb said. "Everybody can participate, that is the beauty of it." Bonitafest's stree entertainment will follow on Sept. 12 at Bonita Vista High School from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Show choirs from the Sweetwater Union High School District will

performing. The last stage of Bonitafest is Branscomb's Bonitafest Melodrama, which will play at 7:30 p.m. from Sept. 24 through 27 at Sweetwater Comm Church, 5305 Sweetwater Road. Branscomb said he had originally planned to produce the melodrama, even if Bonitafest was cancelled. Branscomb said he anticipates this year's Bonitafest to cost about \$7,500 to produce, a drastic cut from the \$19,500 in 2013. As of Monday, \$2,200 had been raised. "We need \$ do everything that we want to do," he said. "That's the cheapest we can do everything." The money covers marketing, banners, logistics, and a performance : Branscomb said he is still seeking financial contributions from community members and businesses. UCSD Health and The Phair Company, owners of a real and development company in Chula Vista, are two of the main donors thus far, Branscomb said. "Our family has been in Bonita for over four generations, so that it is important to help our community," said Kirk Phair. "We are lifelong Bonita Vistans and proud to help bring back Bonitafest." Phair said his family l part of Bonitafest for many years. Branscomb said the Chula Vista Police Department won't be needed for security, which saves money. He said he is waiting back from the Sweetwater district to see what kind of security measures will be needed for the event at Bonita Vista High School. Bonita Business and Prof Association, the title sponsor of the event, announced May 20 that it was cancelling the decades old event as the group was also disbanding. But on Monday former president of the association said she supported the efforts to bring back Bonitafest. "We're really excited about the community rallying in response to continuation of the Bonitafest and he (Branscomb) has 100 percent of our support," said Carri Long-Fernandez, ex-president of BBPA. She also said she pla attend this year's festivities. Branscomb said organizers are working in bringing in food vendors. While Bonitafest was saved in 2014, there are bigger plans "We're going to do 2015 and we're going to try to rebuild it next year," Branscomb said. "This year we're just trying to keep it alive, have some fun and keep capacity together to have a bigger one next year." A community meeting updating the progress on Bonitafest is to be held Aug. 7 at Sweetwater Community 5305 Sweetwater Road, Bonita. (*Chula Vista Star-News*, July 12, 2014)

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