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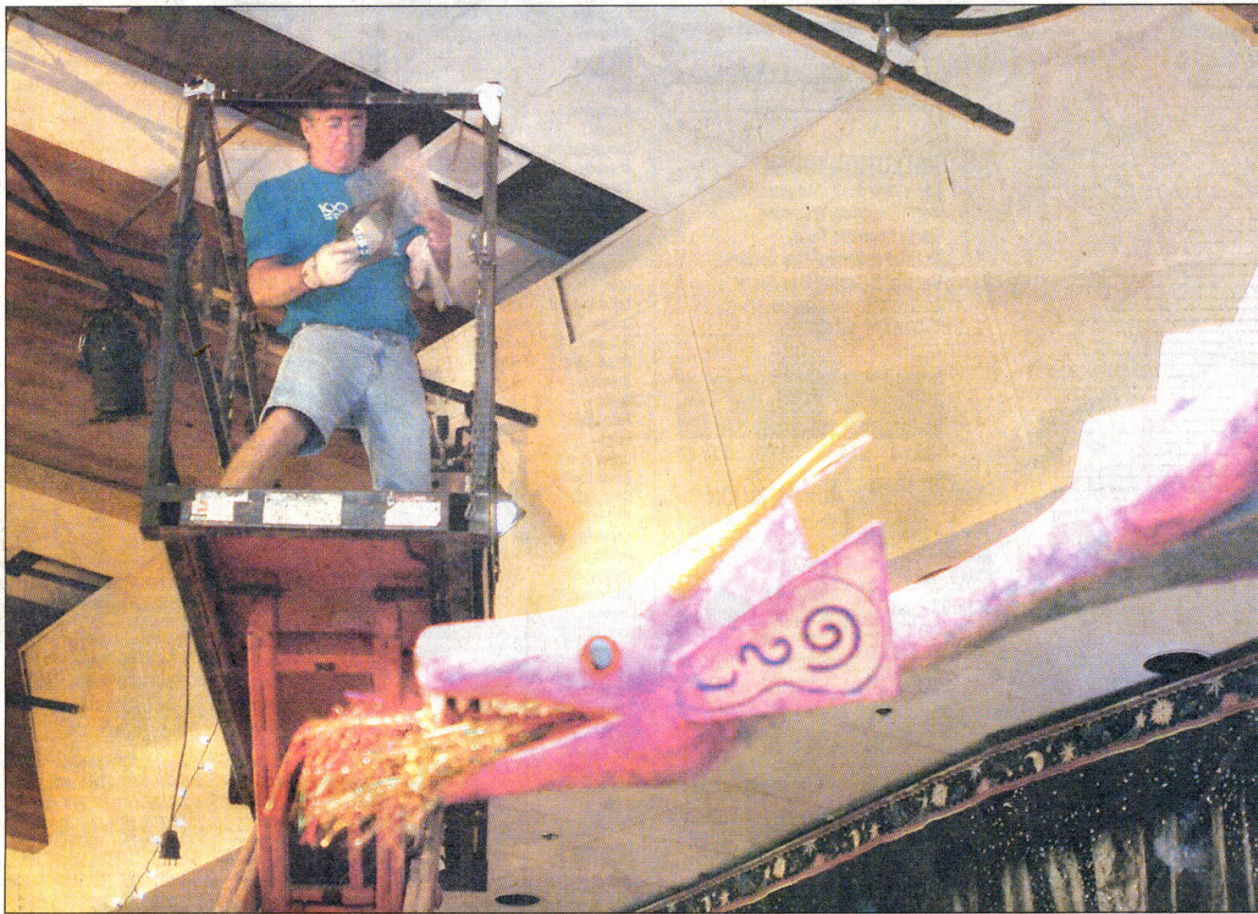
JUNE 30, 2005

THURSDAY

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The birth of a fair

Behind-the-scenes look at staging of Marin event



IJ photo/Frankie Frost

FINAL PREPARATIONS: Dave Watson hangs lights over the Creature and Models exhibit at the Marin County Fair, which opens today.

By Don Speich
IJ reporter

On the left was the 4-foot-high platform on which Darth Vader soon would be standing, in all his menacing dark side blackness. Across the way hung a caricature portrait of Richard Nixon, his nose as long as Pinocchio's at his prevaricating worst. Nearby, a flying 7-foot-long purple dragon breathed fire as it hung frozen in a moment of terrifying aggression.

Upstaging them all, mesmerizing the few mortals present, was a tiny spider descending slowly down a single tread of a web from the tall ceiling, inching between the newly

hung red and white lights beaming down on the threatening evil below.

"Must have gotten a little warm for him up there," said Dave Watson, a lighting technician who was putting up the red, white and yellow lights meant to show off at their scariest the Creature and Models exhibit of the Marin County Fair.

The spider landed and scurried away; everyone smiled, break over, and returned to the quickening tempo of the business at hand — setting up the exhibit that four days later would be on view to the public coming through the turnstiles of the county's 60th fair, which opens today and continues

through Monday.

Today's opening culminates more than a year of work. Most of it goes on behind the scenes until late May and early June, when bit by bit, exhibit by exhibit it begins taking shape. It is, in the end, an event staged by an eclectic cast including county bureaucrats, volunteers and carnival workers from far away. A young carny woman who hawks "the fish game" in which patrons try to toss a ping pong ball into a small fish bowl munched on a sandwich Tuesday and talked about her life in a carnival.

Rachel Haskins, 18, with long, lank

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Rough road to glory for Corte Madera

Town wins affordable housing award after being previously sued over issue

By Richard Halstead
IJ reporter

The town of Corte Madera was honored yesterday by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for removing barriers to affordable housing — five years after a Marin Superior Court judge ordered the town to take action.

HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson singled out Corte Madera as one of 14 communities in the United States that is "answering the call and demonstrating that it can get the job done when it comes to cutting red tape and encouraging the production of affordable housing." Oxnard was the only other city in California to receive the award.

Corte Madera Mayor John Dupar and Town Manager Jay Tashiro were in Washington D.C. yesterday to personally accept the award from Jackson. The award came as a surprise, however, to some who have witnessed the town's reluctant compliance with affordable housing laws over the years.

"How could they have been sued for not doing what they were required to do to provide affordable housing and then get an award?" asked Richard Skaff, who lost his seat on the Corte Madera Town Council in 1985 due to his support for two affordable housing projects.

"That's ludicrous," Skaff said. "They haven't done anything because of their own good will."

Corte Madera has a checkered past when it comes to supporting the creation of affordable housing. In 1985, two affordable housing projects — 60 units at 5401 Paradise Drive and 80 units on land just north of The Village shopping center — were killed by a building moratorium imposed by a local ballot initiative. In addition to passing the moratorium, voters elected two of the most vocal opponents of af-

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HOUSING SAGA

A brief history of Corte Madera's encounter with affordable housing:

1985: Corte Madera residents approve a building moratorium, killing two affordable housing projects and elect two opponents of affordable housing to the Town Council.

1993: A plan for 46 affordable units at The Village dies when the town's Planning Commission insists on a costly environmental impact report.

1998: Legal Aid of Marin sues Corte Madera because the town's housing element has been out of compliance with state law since 1990.

2000: Marin County Superior Court judge issues an injunction against Corte Madera imposing a series of stringent requirements. Sets May 2001 deadline for adopting housing element.

2001: A plan to build 128 housing units, half of which would have been affordable, at Madera Bay Park fails when town officials change minds about granting necessary zoning changes.

2002: After town misses nine previous deadlines, judge issues a final judgment ordering the town to adopt a valid housing element no later than August 2002. The town complies.

2004: Town Council votes 3-2 to approve a 79-unit, affordable apartment building at San Clemente Drive near Paradise Drive.

2005: HUD gives award to Corte Madera for reducing regulatory barriers to affordable housing.

FAIR: Today's opening culminates yearlong effort

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brown hair and a pierced lower lip and the air of a weary veteran, joined the carnival about a year ago in her home state of Washington.

"I came off the streets," she said, and started hanging out at the fair, riding rides and finally getting noticed and getting offered a job. She said she's been sober ever since and says the job, like all jobs, "is what you make of it." She moves from one fair to the other, week in and week out, spring through fall. At her last stop in Stockton, a man was shot to death in front of her fish game, she said.

As a reporter walked away across the midway strewn with bumper cars, mushroom rides and merry-go-rounds waiting to be assembled, the young woman called out, "Hey, you dropped some papers." As she ran up to him, she smiled, and for the first time looked very much the teenager she is.

Earlier that morning, tents that had been erected over the past several days were awaiting the merchants who would be using them to sell their wares. A computerized palm reader and his partner from Southern California who makes customized toe rings said they had gotten there early so they could enjoy the restaurants and beaches in the area before the start of the fair.

Asked about the computer, Bob Tannenbaum of Las Vegas laughed. "I'm too dumb to do it myself."

His partner, Midge Garner of Lancaster, said a little more than a year ago she was an accountant but was restless to "do something interesting and to travel." So, she joined up with a carny and became a specialist in toe rings, which can run from a few dollars to nearly \$100.

Back at the Exhibit Hall, lawyers and nurses and kids and grandparents carried in the labors of love soon to be judged. Cookies, pies, cakes headed through the parking lot into the hall.

Robert Brower, an El Sobrante lawyer and veteran participant and award winner, offered a new acquaintance a nut-studded cookie. "Amazing," said the acquaintance of the perfection masquerading as a cookie.



READY TO ROLL: Macro Lopez sits on a rail about 25 feet off the ground as a crew sets up a roller coaster.



PICTURE PERFECT: Art Rogers takes directions from his daughter, Julia (left), as friend Chris Marcous hangs Rogers' photos at the fair. Rogers has photographed generations of families, displaying current photos beside ones of the families made earlier, some in the 1970s.

*IJ photos
by Frankie Frost*