

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Roller Coaster ("The Big Dipper") and Carousel

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number along Beach Street \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Santa Cruz \_\_\_ vicinity of

state California code \_\_\_\_\_ county Santa Cruz code \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Recreation

**4. Owner of Property**

name Mr. Charles Canfield, President

street & number Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Inc., 400 Beach Street

city, town Santa Cruz \_\_\_ vicinity of state California 95060

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder's Office, County Courthouse

street & number 701 Ocean Street

city, town Santa Cruz state California 95060

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title See Page entry in bibliography has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records \_\_\_\_\_

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### Summary

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, which contains a variety of amusement facilities, occupies a generally rectangular plot that stretches along the beach in downtown Santa Cruz from the vicinity of the Municipal Pier to the Beach Street bridge over the San Lorenzo River. The complex has undergone changes to fit its facilities to succeeding generations of fashion, as have practically all extant amusement parks. Within the Boardwalk complex two elements have sufficient age and historic integrity to suggest them for National Historic Landmark designation in recognition of the Boardwalk's historic significance: the carousel, which is the oldest ride on the Boardwalk, and the "Big Dipper," the park's roller coaster. Two major early structures in the complex, the Casino and the Natatorium, have been sufficiently altered over the years to effectively rule them out of consideration for designation. The other elements of the Boardwalk are less than 50 years old, and will not be inventoried here.

### Carousel

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Carousel, in place since 1911, features 70 hand-carved horses. It is one of the handful of carousels that feature a ring dispenser. Although not all the horses in place are original, a careful restoration effort, in 1980-82, replaced some 11 horses that had been substituted over the years with original Loeff horses, obtained from carousels in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Belmont Park, in San Diego. Loeff's horses are characterized by long flowing manes, imitation jewel-studded bridles, highly muscular legs, and smiling expressions. The carousel's music is provided by a 342-pipe Ruth band organ that dates from 1894. This German-made machine is one of the last of its type that survives.

The carousel is housed in a modern shelter, erected in 1967, that does not contribute to its historic significance. It is uncertain whether or not the carousel has remained fixed on this precise spot since it arrived in Santa Cruz, but, contrary to many of its brethren that have been moved repeatedly, it has remained at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk since it arrived.<sup>1</sup>

### Roller Coaster

The "Big Dipper" or "Giant Dipper" dates from 1924. It is a classic wooden "twister"-type coaster with sweeping fan curves, providing a half-mile ride. Its arches reach a maximum height of 75 feet. Its basic structure and form are intact, although some wood has been incrementally replaced for safety reasons. Approximately 327,000 board feet of lumber was used in its construction. A replacement loading platform, put up in 1976, features a Victorian-style facade. The roller coaster's cars have also been replaced, most recently in 1984; those now in service have been designed to appear similar to those that operated in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Recreation

**Specific dates** Carousel (1911) **Builder Architect** Carousel (Charles I. D. Looff)  
Roller Coaster (1924) Roller Coaster (Arthur Looff)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

### Summary

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is the last major operating seaside boardwalk-amusement park on the Pacific Coast. It is a mixture of past and present amusement attractions that reflect 77 years of evolution of this aspect of recreation. Its intact historic remains are a carousel and a roller coaster by members of the Looff family, one of the major early manufacturers of carousels, who later built notable roller coasters. The carousel is one of the six Looff carousels that survive in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The "Big Dipper," or "Giant Dipper," roller coaster is one of the two large wooden scaffolded roller coasters that remain on the West Coast, and is slightly older than the other, that at Mission Beach in San Diego by Frank Prior and Fred Church. The "Big Dipper," however, was built using Prior and Church patents. The Santa Cruz coaster is the only one on the West Coast that remains the centerpiece of an active amusement park.

### History

Although Santa Cruz, with its mild climate and attractive beaches, became something of a resort as early as 1865, when the first public bathhouse was built in the town, it did not attract amusement park development until after the turn of the century. In 1904, Fred W. Swanton, a great promoter, laid plans for a casino and boardwalk patterned after those at Coney Island. His Neptune Casino operated only until 1906, when it was destroyed by fire. Undeterred, Swanton retained architect William W. Weeks, who drew plans that included a new casino, an indoor swimming pool or natatorium, a "pleasure" pier, and a boardwalk. The new facilities opened in June 1907. The next year, the first "thrill" ride at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk opened; it was the L.A. Thompson Scenic Railroad, a miniature train with small "hills" of a roller coaster type that ran through the area presently occupied by the "Big Dipper."<sup>2</sup>

In 1911, the Boardwalk acquired its carousel from the Long Beach, California, "factory" of Charles I.D. Looff, one of the nation's foremost carousel carvers. The carousel, which remains at the Boardwalk, has been one of its primary attractions over the years and has carried some 60 million passengers.<sup>3</sup>

Charles I.D. Looff was one of the earliest manufacturers of carousels in the United States. He built his first carousel at Coney Island, New York, in 1876 and was probably the first person in the United States to carve carousel horses

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Approximately 24

Quadrangle name Santa Cruz

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	0	5	8	7	2	5	0	4	0	9	1	1	3	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

1	0	5	8	8	1	8	0	4	0	9	1	4	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

1	0	5	8	8	2	0	0	4	0	9	1	2	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

1	0	5	8	7	3	0	0	4	0	9	1	0	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date October 15, 1984

street & number 1100 "L" Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20240

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The Casino

The Casino at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk was one of several buildings constructed in 1907. As first built, it was a large 2-story wooden structure with "onion" domes reminiscent of Russian architecture. On the ocean front, it possessed a large twelve-sided feature on both floors that protruded toward the sea and ranges of arcades that sprang from both its sides and paralleled the beach front. The arcades covered the wooden boardwalk. Above the arcades, on the second level, were offices and storage rooms.

The Cocoanut Grove Ballroom and lobby of the Casino building were carefully restored in 1981 to a facsimile of their 1907 appearance. Large rooms were also added in a more modern design. Earlier, about 1950, the exterior had been altered extensively. The west, or ballroom, end of the complex received major concrete additions in a modern style. They displaced the arcaded section on that end, and totally altered the structure's external appearance. The twelve-sided section was done over in a stripped-down style that matched the modern additions to its west and its fenestration was altered. The arcaded section to the east, however, retained its original configuration, although much of it has been rebuilt. The boardwalk was done over in concrete at an unknown date.<sup>3</sup>

The Natatorium

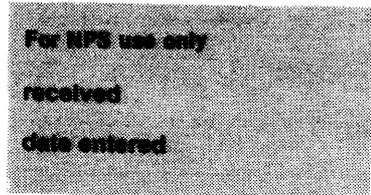
This large 1907 structure with a great bowed roof retains a fair measure of exterior integrity. It is behind the eastern arcaded section of the casino complex. Its swimming pool has, however, been filled in with concrete and the structure now serves as a miniature golf course.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "Boardwalk Features Classic Carousel," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News, pp. 1-3; National Carousel Association, National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles: National Carousel Association, 1983), p. 6; "The Looff at Santa Cruz, California," Merry-Go-Roundup, 5, 1 (Winter 1978), p. 29.
- 2 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "Giant Dipper to Celebrate 60th Birthday," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News, pp. 1-3.
- 3 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "The Cocoanut Grove: From Nostalgic Ballroom to Modern Conference Center," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News, pp. 1-4.

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and to make their frames. Although he did not build nearly the number of carousels that other manufacturers did, his work was noted for its quality. His early work was done in the East but at the turn of the century he moved to Long Beach and thereafter executed nearly all of his work in the West.

In 1924, Charles I.D. Looff's son, Arthur Looff, persuaded the Boardwalk's owners to replace the Scenic Railway with the "Giant Dipper" roller coaster. Since its opening, the coaster has carried more than 25 million riders and remains one of the most popular attractions at the Boardwalk. That same year, the first Miss California Pageant was held at the Boardwalk, and the winner went on to become Miss America.

During the 1930's Depression and 1940's wartime travel restrictions, the Boardwalk's business went into eclipse. The Natatorium, which had featured water shows including daredevil diving and water ballet (and served as a location for swimming instruction) also drew fewer patrons, especially after 1942, when local officials curtailed the more spectacular stunts for safety reasons. The Casino, with its Cocoanut Grove Ballroom, however, was at the height of its popularity, attracting celebrity performers of the "big band" era.

In the 1930s, names such as Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Buddy Rogers, Xavier Cugat, Vincent Lopez, and Glen Gray adorned the marquee. In the 1940s, Gene Krupa, Dick Jurgen, Tommy Dorsey, Freddy Martin, Russ Morgan, Merv Griffin, Lawrence Welk, Kay Kyser, and Harry Owens packed in large crowds of servicemen from nearby military installations, drawing up to almost 4,000 people in an evening.

Although the big band era faded in the 1950s, orchestras such as those led by Billy May, Les Elgart, Hal McIntyre, and Si Zentner continued the dances at the Cocoanut Grove. The emphasis switched to teen dances in the 1960s, with a few contemporary artists; vocalists, including Nat "King" Cole, Sonny and Cher, the New Christy Minstrels, and the Four Freshmen, appearing. Following a renovation in 1965, the ballroom was used mostly for private events with very few public dances, but did enjoy something of a renaissance during the "big band" revival of the late 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk remains a popular "family-style" attraction and includes an array of facilities that permit visitors to sample several generations of amusements. It is a rare survivor of a vanishing breed, the old-style amusement park.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 This conclusion was reached by study of the Loeff-related entries in National Carousel Association, National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles: National Carousel Association, 1983), passim.
- 2 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "Behind-The-Scenes Facts," pp. 1-2.
- 3 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "Boardwalk Features Classic Carousel," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News, pp. 1-3.
- 4 Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, "The Cocoanut Grove: From Nostalgic Ballroom to Modern Conference Center," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News, pp. 1-3.

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National Carousel Association. National Carousel Association Census. Los Angeles: National Carousel Association, 1983. (Mimeographed.)

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"Santa Cruz," Merry-Go-Roundup, (October 1978), pp. 9-11.

"Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk," Amusement Park Journal, 4,3 (Fall 1982), pp. 22-23.

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. "Behind-the-Scenes Facts." 2 pp. (Fact sheet, ca. 1983.)

\_\_\_\_\_. "Boardwalk Features Classic Carousel," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News. 3 pp. (Press release, 1984.)

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Coconut Grove: From Nostalgic Ballroom to Modern Conference Center," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News. 4 pp. (Press release, 1984.)

\_\_\_\_\_. "Giant Dipper to Celebrate 60th Birthday," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News. 3 pp. (Press release, 1984.)

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk: California's Only Remaining Beachside Amusement Park," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News. 6 pp. (Press release, 1984.)

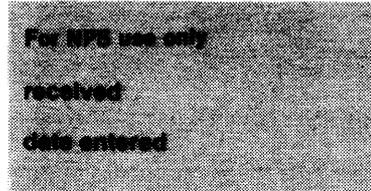
\_\_\_\_\_. "Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Fact Sheet," Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk News. 3 pp. (Press release, 1984.)

"The Looff at Santa Cruz, California," Merry-Go-Roundup, 5, 1 (Winter 1978), pp. 29-31.

"The West Coast Boardwalk," Amusement Park Journal, 2, 1 (March 1980), pp. 35-37.

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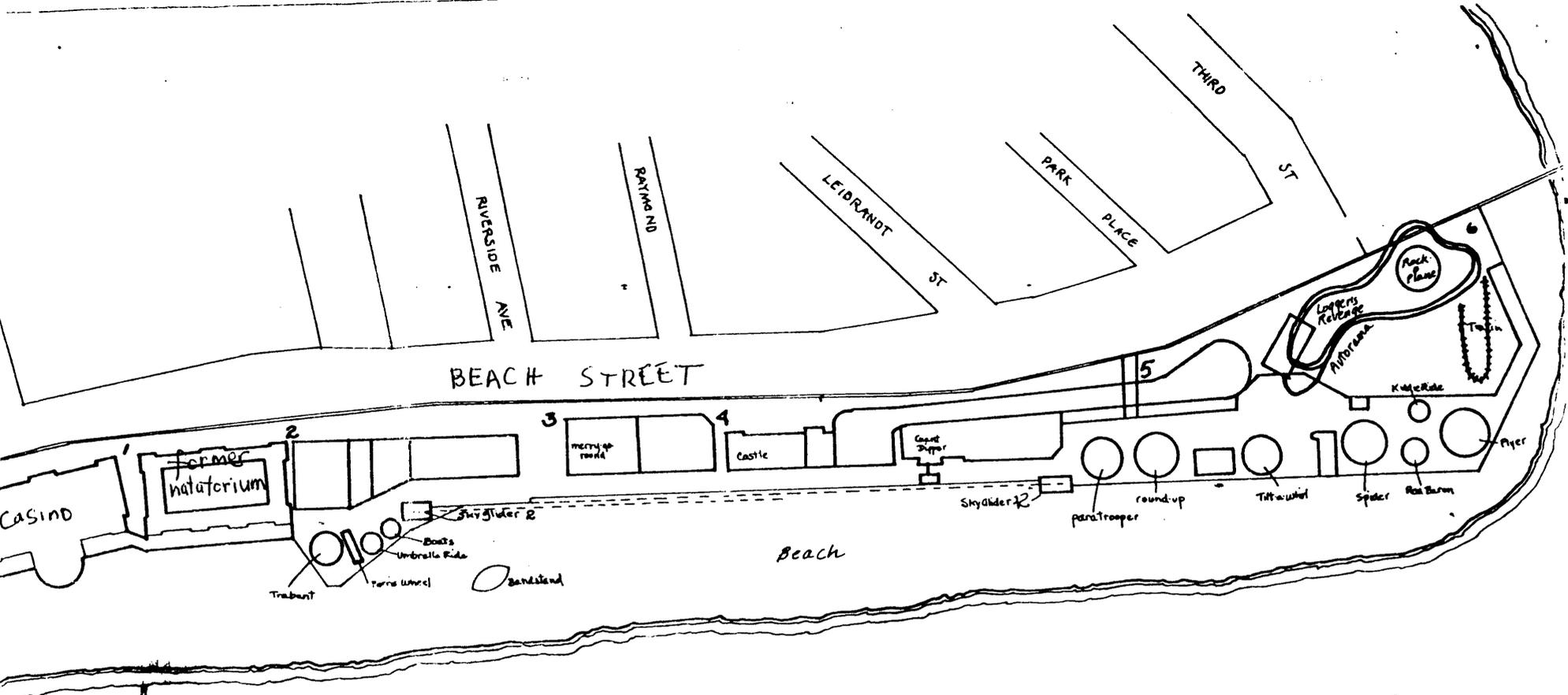
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Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

Because of the proximity of the roller coaster to other amusement facilities, some movable, at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, it is not easy to draw a boundary that would exclude impinging on other resources. The carousel, which is not adjacent to the roller coaster, is housed in a non-historic structure and may not historically have remained on its present precise site, although it has remained within the amusement zone since it was brought to the Boardwalk in 1911. Therefore, for convenience's sake, the boundaries assigned are those indicated on the attached map, which are those of the entire amusement zone at the boardwalk. These boundaries are, roughly speaking, Beach Street, on the north; the San Lorenzo River, on the east; the sea, on the south; and the east edge of the the Boardwalk's parking lot, on the west. The only structures that are presently judged to contribute to the historic significance of the property, however, are the "Giant Dipper" roller coaster and the 1911 Looff carousel.



SANTA CRUZ SEASIDE COMPANY