

Founders Fest draws mixed reaction

By Susan Steinmueller
staff writer

DESPITE THE 95-degree temperatures that kept some away from the Farmington Founders Festival, shoppers and those selling their goods Friday said the event was good to them.

At the 22nd annual festival — held Thursday through Saturday during the hottest, stickiest time of the summer — crafts and other items were sold from large tents in the Downtown Farmington Center area, and many merchants featured sidewalk sales.

Two enthusiastic shoppers were Inge Tenbrunsel of Farmington Hills and her friend, Jackie Brown of Walled Lake, who came to the sun-drenched event for the first time.

"I drove past it yesterday," Tenbrunsel said. "I said, 'Hey, Jackie, we gotta go there. There's something good going on.'"

"This is great," she said, eyeing some more sidewalk sales. "You can stay all day here."

"We're doing year-round Christmas shopping, showers, everything," said Brown, displaying her packages. "You get a lot of good bargains."

"And, there's a lot of good food," Tenbrunsel said. "You never have to go hungry."

As the two rushed off to do some more heavy-duty bargain shopping, Brown called out, "If you want to shop, you better come soon, or we'll have bought all the bargains!"

ANOTHER HAPPY shopper was Ellen King of Farmington Hills, who was browsing at the Son Ton Shoppe sidewalk sale. She had already made a find — a notebook personalized with her husband Pete's name.

"I usually come every year," she said. "I usually look at what's on the sidewalk. I don't go inside. If they don't have anything on the sidewalk, then tough luck on the stores!"

"I usually bring somebody with me every year, but they bowed out today because of the heat."

"I've always enjoyed it," she added. "We've lived here for 20 years." The first few years, she said, "My

kids were always in the band, or marched in the parade or something like that. Now I just come for the sales."

Paul Becker of Toronto, in the area on business, was wandering around with a friend before returning to Toronto.

He said he hadn't bought anything yet. "I haven't looked really," he said. "It beats sitting in a motel room all afternoon in the heat."

NOT EVERYONE came just to buy.

Shopper Mary Loeffler of Novi, who came earlier in the day, said she would buy something if it caught her fancy, but she also came to get ideas from craft exhibitors for her own craft and sewing business.

"I've sewed since I've been 10 years old — I admire everyone's work," she said.

And Judy and Jim White of Farmington Hills, who also came early, they said, to beat the heat, were there "just to look."

Exhibitors included Carolyn Perfetti and partner Joy Kiddie.

"This is the only show we do in Michigan," Perfetti said. "It's not just the show, it's the whole thing — the exhibitors and the people. We have met some real nice people here."

Their Mount Clemens business, which sells handmade porcelain dolls modeled after antique dolls, is called Carol-N-Joy Dolls.

Business had been good despite the heat, she said early Friday. "Last year, we broke a record (in sales) — but who knows, it's only our second year."

She said the show was good for their business not only in sales, but in garnering new customers who will look them up later.

DONALD CARPENTER, selling wares from Herb Hang Up, the business he and wife Phyllis run in Britton, said of business, "Yesterday was fair. Today was down because it's too hot. People can only tolerate so much heat. If it's more comfortable to stay home under a tree, that's where they are going to stay."

The business sells items such as dried flower bouquets and wreaths, potpourri and herbs. "Anything that will dry, and is presentable, we use," he said. "It works out real well."

At the sidewalk sales, Julie Gruch, salesperson at the clothing store Tempo, looked over a sidewalk table filled with items such as striped turtleneck T-shirts, shirts and bathing suits.

"Rather busy," is how she described business. "The spring and summer stuff, we put out," to make way for fall and winter fashions. "It gets rid of some of our stock. We make some money," she said.

Had the heat cut down on business? "A little bit," she said.

The North Farmington Boys Basketball Booster Club were among the concession stands doing hot business.

"They've been buying pop the most," said John La Bute, who was selling pop and Popicles with Steve Hill. The 39-cent Popicle, Great American Chilly Pop, was popular too, he said.

THE FARMINGTON Rotary was selling pop and pizza. Jim Ellis, president-elect, said business was down over last year because of the heat, but that they had sold more pop than usual.

"But it's always a profitable operation," he said. "It's just a matter of how much. It all goes to charity."

The event is a major fund-raiser for groups such as the Rotary.

Andrew Baker, owner of Pictures and More, said he sells some of his slow moving items at or below cost at the festival.

This year, he sold frames for \$1, and the most expensive item were posters at \$10.

"It introduces a lot of people to the core too — to the community," said Baker, who is a member of the

Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

"For us, it's like three days out of the year that we can have a lot of fun at this store," he said. "We can enjoy the people and not feel you have to go back and do the books."

FOR BAKER and his wife, Julie, the Farmington Founders Festival also has sentimental significance. The couple was engaged at the Farmington Elks Lodge Ox Roast tent at the festival two years ago.

"This is almost like an anniversary for us," he said.

However, he said, because of the long hours spent preparing for and then participating in the event, there is one disadvantage.

"The only drawback is by the time we close, my wife and I don't have time to enjoy the festival."

However, he added, "We usually hit the beer tent all three nights. It's a good chance to unwind after working 13 to 14 hours."

Baker held the grand opening of his store three years ago during Founders Festival. "I hope it (the festival) continues," he said.



Aaron Johnson, 12, of New Braunfels, Texas, carries a bag of ice back to the family booth on the grounds of the Farmington Masonic Temple.

Heat wave Crowds held down

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

The weather — 95-degree temperatures and high humidity, which made it feel like 105 degrees outside — kept the crowds down.

That's the belief of JoAnn Soronen, executive director of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, which sponsored the 22nd annual Farmington Founders Festival July 17-19 in cooperation with the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

But there were no reports of heat stroke, even during the Fox Trot Runs Saturday morning, Soronen said.

The family fest was centered in Downtown Farmington.

"Everything went smoothly in terms of setup," Soronen said Saturday. "There was practically no crisis. From that standpoint, the festival was a tremendous success."

But, she added, "I am sorry the weather is so hot. I don't think some of the crafters and food vendors sold what they had anticipated. I have to attribute that to the heat. It is very, very hot out there."

ALTHOUGH THE crowds were generally lower than in the past, people came out in the evening.

"It was as if, when the sun went down, people popped out of the sidewalk and began doing all the things you'd expect them to do at a festival," Soronen said.

"But I don't know if that made up for what the vendors and crafters missed in business during the day time. Today, the crowds weren't too

bad, but I suspect a lot stayed around after the morning parade."

Soronen thanked entertainment chairman Eric Johnston for lining up first-rate entertainment catering to a variety of musical tastes — from barbershop to rock.

"We had some terrific acts, including new ones," Soronen said. "In the evening, the chairs filled up. But that's typical. A lot of local people walk or drive down and watch all night. During the day, though, people were entertaining before empty chairs. Who could sit out there on those metal chairs in the hot sun?"

LIGHT RAINFALL would have been welcome.

"But Michigan and outdoor fairs and festivals is always an iffy thing. I can't predict it. I can't change it," Soronen said.

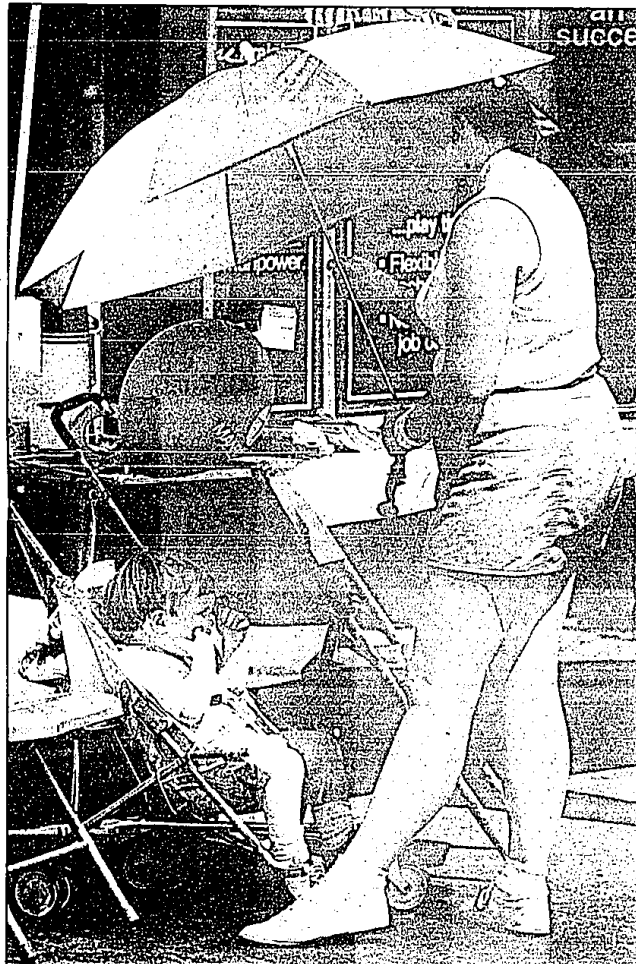
This year, crafters were under a tent.

"But it was awful hot under there," Soronen said. "That didn't really solve the problem. It got them out of the sun but it cut out any breeze. Short of moving the festival to the Silverdome, I don't know how to compensate for the weather."

An Oakway Symphony concert and a spectacular fireworks display at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus capped the festival. But crowds again seemed smaller than in the past.

"I attribute that to the heat and people feeling lethargic about going out anywhere," Soronen said.

With that, preliminary planning has begun for Founders Fest '87, which will be part of Michigan's sesquicentennial celebration.



Debbie Massa of Farmington shares an umbrella with 2-year-old son, Danny, in the Downtown Farmington Center.

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