

Entertainment

Despite complaints, Founders Festival still drew big crowds

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Organizers of the Farmington Area Founders Festival probably already know what did or didn't fare well in last weekend's community shindig. All they had to do was listen, to customers and to crafters and vendors, some who were disappointed.

On the positive side of the ledger, most people who came out for the first festival managed by Mike and Sandra Watts of Watts-Up Inc. enjoyed the available crafts, food and entertainment. The parade Saturday morning was a splendid mix of sight and sound, under beautiful blue skies.

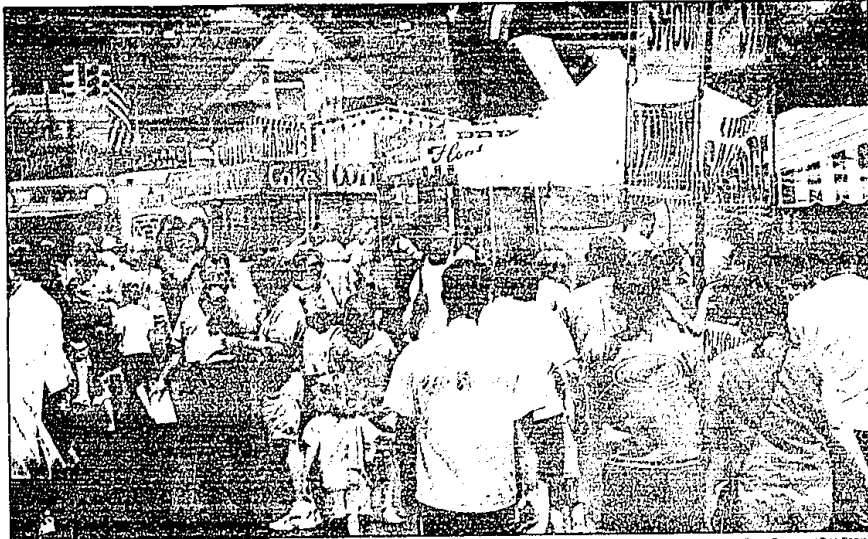
But the Wattses and nonprofit Farmington Area Founders Festival Inc. will need to find out why some crafters were complaining and vowing to not come back in 2000.

Or, why there were fewer floats and participants in the parade. Those questions will be discussed by festival organizers and city officials beginning in September, said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff.

"For the first year, given the fact that Watts-Up got this just a few months before the festival, I think everything went off fine," Lauhoff said Monday. "I think we've all learned a lot. I know Watts-Up has learned a lot of things from this because they've never been involved in this festival at all before."

According to Lauhoff, issues that cropped up will be closely examined. Among those he mentioned included placement of vendors, music offerings and make-up and size of the parade.

"We'll sit down and look at each individual aspect of the festival," Lauhoff said. "We've (already) talked about, should we get rid of the huge tent and put everybody under the small, white canopy tents."



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN BUCKNER

Food, glorious food: Doesn't matter the time of day, food of all kinds draw festival goers as they converged on culinary offerings in the Downtown Farmington Center parking lot Saturday afternoon.

"I think, all in all, the festival actually went very well," Flaherty said. "We need to understand this is a year of transition and we faced competition from other areas, Royal Oak, Trenton, the Plymouth Art in the Park."

"And that's definitely going to be competition for the crafters and artists who want to show their wares."

Flaherty said Friday and Saturday evening entertainment was well received and drew good crowds, and that the parade trig-

"Nothing's ever perfect," he said. "But everything was done as it was planned."

Friday, summing up the general feeling about there being fewer vendors and crafters to choose from was Farmington resident Carol Cornillie.

"It doesn't seem like they have as much," said Cornillie, walking past some booths with her sons. "It seems like there are less crafters and vendors than in years past ... There's just more space on the grass."

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Carleigh Flaherty
—Chamber president

Friday morning, so maybe that killed some of the traffic."

Henninger also said he "heard complaints from people who wanted to be in the parade" but were denied entry.

Overall, however, this year's version still entertained the masses.

"I think the people did seem to still have a good time," said Henninger, adding that the community should wait until after the 2000 festival to judge the quality



Notes: Folk music from Peru was played by the group, Siasai.

of job being done by Watts-Up, which took over management of this year's event in mid-stream.

Lauhoff bemoaned the timing of this year's festival as a factor that likely cut into attendance and number of crafters and vendors.

Besides facing competition from other similar events, the festival took place right on the heels of the July 4 weekend.

"That (timing) is an issue I will be bringing up," Lauhoff said. "I cannot remember another time when it was the same week the Fourth of July holiday ended."

"And, with everything else going on, we need to look at moving it further into the month of July," Lauhoff said he would like to see the festival bumped back at least one, if not two, weeks.



End of the day: Late evening shoppers browse through an art booth that specializes in floral painting on slate.

Many of the crafters and vendors were stationed under a big yellow tent in the parking lot of the Downtown Farmington Center.

Carleigh Flaherty, president of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, said Watts-Up did a "very professional" job on this year's festival under difficult circumstances.

The FAFF, a citizens group, took over the event from the chamber, who in January hired Watts-Up to manage the event. The chamber is part of the FAFF board.

gered a turnaround of activity for some vendors and crafters.

Mike Watts, Tuesday, said complaints slowed down after weather improved later on Friday. By the end of the festival, he said crafters and vendors were offering deposits for the 2000 festival.

"Naysayers just yell louder than everybody else," Watts said. "I think the vast majority of people enjoyed the festival."

Watts said he didn't yet have financial figures, but he projected a profit — with money going back into the planning for next year's event.

ous show were moved from the city property (Memorial Park) where they set up shop in past years. Flaherty said they were moved for liability issues, adding that those who stayed at Memorial Park paid a higher fee.

"She did say there was an effort to reduce the number of vendors who sell commercial products."

Big Apple Bagel owner Dave Henninger said he saw some pluses, particularly the Friday and Saturday evening entertainment.

"But for me, it didn't seem the (pedestrian) traffic was as good," Henninger said. "... It did rain on

Flaherty, however, said the actual number of crafters wasn't significantly down from last year. But it might have looked that way, she explained, because of a different layout.

"I think it (the layout) played a big role," Flaherty said, "because it looked different. And if it looks different, people think the numbers are down."

Those crafters in Masonic Temple's simultaneous show were moved from the city property (Memorial Park) where they set up shop in past years. Flaherty said they were moved for liability issues, adding that those who stayed at Memorial Park paid a higher fee.

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On stage: The Chisel Brothers perform for a Friday evening crowd. The band was formed in 1987 and they play contemporary updates of traditional rhythm and blues numbers.