

Festivals thrive in close-knit communities

BY AILEEN WINGBLAD
STAFF WRITER

CALL IT HOMETOWN pride. Or an escape from the everyday. Or simply an old-fashioned celebration.

Community festivals seem to be thriving. And area folks apparently love them with their big-time fun and small-town atmosphere. With a focus on family-oriented entertainment and simple good times, seasonal festivals are a hit with their parades, ceremonies and other special events, regularly drawing thousands and thousands of people who come out to enjoy community-spirited celebrations.

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executive director
Farmington/Farmington Hills
Chamber of Commerce*

"I guess maybe festivals are small-town stuff — that's what they mean. It's family entertainment where we try to provide something for everyone," said Jody Sorenen, executive director of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce.

The Farmington area recently celebrated its 28th annual Founders Festival in full style, complete with a grand parade, sidewalk sales, arts and crafts fairs, entertainment and other special events.

"And the people of Farmington think that this is good," adds Sorenen. "They are pleased with being in a small community with a downtown and all . . . in Southeast Michigan that's quite unique."

Indeed, it seems that the smaller local cities which have specified downtown areas have found formulae for success when it comes to hosting seasonal community events. Lots of spirit and coordinated effort by city officials, merchants and residents.

Communities like Rochester and Birmingham — both of which boast thriving downtown districts — really seem to have what it takes to pull off favorable festivals.

Birmingham, for example, has established itself as a city rich in cultural continuity and character, with a variety of community-sponsored activities scheduled throughout the year.

"It's all part of the tradition in our town, promoting the whole community to get involved," said Lori Eick,



SHARON LEMLEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Festival fun: Craig Trombley waves, Ship Rosenthal plays the banjo and Sarah Layton and Lynn Kujath ride a float in the recent Farmington Founders Festival.

executive director of the Birmingham/Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce.

"And there is a lot of pride in the community of Birmingham," continues Eick. "The people in our community are educated people who believe in raising children in the 'right' way — you see it by the participation, by the families who get involved. It's all a part of the tradition. Also, we have a nucleus here: a downtown park and a viable downtown area that is healthy."

"And, of course, City Hall makes sure all our events happen safely and properly," she adds.

Katy Bloodgood, executive director of the Greater

Rochester Chamber of Commerce, echoes Eick's sentiments about the importance of a flourishing downtown and plenty of local support.

"A lot of downtowns have died — ours is just the opposite. We have a very active DDA (Downtown Development Authority) and a good partnership with the merchants and all. It's a very vital downtown," said Bloodgood.

One of Rochester's most lauded events is the Christmas Parade, which draws about 50,000 folks downtown each year. The city also hosts the highly successful Arts 'n' Apples art fair every September, as well as the

celebrated Heritage Festival over Memorial Day weekend.

"Families here can walk downtown — it's a very safe, warm atmosphere. These events are certainly well-enjoyed and participated in. It all helps to enhance the downtown community," said Bloodgood.

And it appears likely that those towns which have had success with the community festivals will continue doing so, as long as the popularity remains high and the glitches are kept to a minimum.

Says Farmington's Sorenen: "We'll keep doing it as long as people keep going."

How to shape up your boat to ship out on 'Family Day'

BY CAREY HANS
STAFF WRITER

It may not be as grand as the Port Huron to Mackinac race.

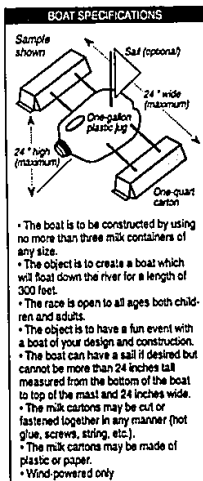
But Farmington's miniature boat races on the Rouge River Saturday, Aug. 22, won't take nearly as long, and will offer some good, old-fashioned fun for kids and adults ages five and up.

The races are part of "Family Day in the Park," a day of festivities in Farmington's Shawwassee Park which commemorates the anniversary of Farmington's incorporation as a village 125 years ago. The park is on Shawwassee between Farmington and Power roads.

The races begin at 3 p.m. If you plan to participate, organizers suggest arriving about half an hour earlier at the Rouge River footbridge to register yourself and your boat.

"It might be total chaos, but we'll have a good time," said Farmington councilman Arnie Campbell, coordinator of the miniature boat race. "I just thought it would be something fun to try and use the river — something to allow people to use their creativity."

The race will be divided into age categories, including 5-8, 9-12, 13-16 and 17-adult and will be done in heats, if needed. Boats must be built by using no more than three milk containers of any size and material, and can be no more than 24



inches tall and 24 inches wide. Campbell reminds those constructing boats not to use water so-

luble glue if they want the boat to stay together.

The object is to create a boat which will float easily along the river for about 300 feet, and one that is uniquely designed and constructed. Although no motors or battery-powered vehicles are allowed, participants may add a sail to their crafts if they wish.

Does the miniature boat race harken back to 125 years ago? Campbell isn't sure, but believes the idea fits in well. "I would assume with the river, kids were playing there," he said. "There was also much more family orientation back then."

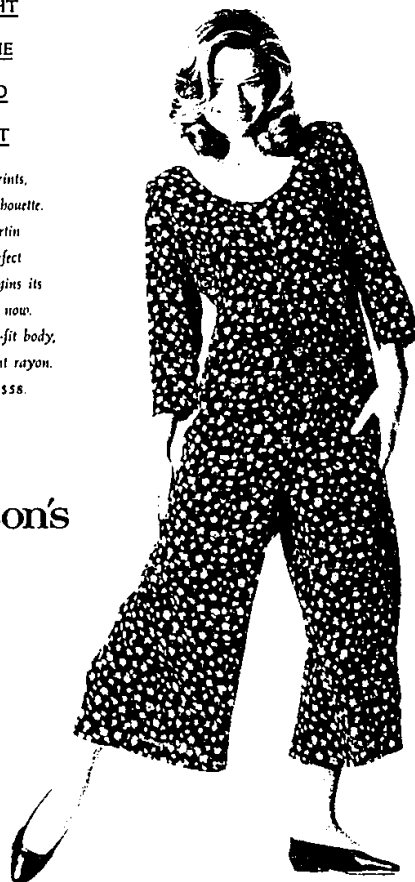
"This is a project families can work together on," Campbell said he has no idea how many people to expect, although some groups like Cub Scout troops have shown an interest in participating. Farmington Hills parks and recreation personnel have entry forms, as do employees at Farmington City Hall, or you can register on the day of the event.

For those who aren't into pre-planning, those from the Farmington Community Library who are organizing arts and crafts in the park that day will have pre-constructed wooden boats which people will be able to decorate. Campbell said they will hold separate boat races for the decorated wooden boats.

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Heritage house tour scheduled

A special tour of historic Farmington-area homes and buildings will be held this fall to commemorate the 125th Anniversary of Farmington's incorporation as a village.

Sponsored by the Farmington Historical Society, the Farmington Historical Commission and the Farmington Hills Historical Commission, the tour will feature 13 different historic structures.

Tickets for the tour are \$10 if purchased in advance, or \$12 on the day of the event. The tour will be on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19 and 20. Tickets are available at both Farmington and Farmington Hills city halls, the Farmington Historical Museum, the Community Center of Farmington-Farmington Hills,

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and at all Metrobank offices. Tickets can also be ordered by mail from Nancy Willyard, 35810 13 Mile, Farmington Hills, MI 48331.

The tour, which runs from 1-5

p.m. both days, will feature: the Elcanore Spicer House in Heritage Park, the Edward Moseman House on Biddestone, the Samuel Locke House on 11 Mile, the Ward Eagle House and John Trick Blacksmith Shop on 14 Mile, the John Dallas Harger House on 12 Mile, the Hamlin Jones House on 12 Mile, the John Gardfield House on 13 Mile, the Universalist-Unitarian Church on Halsted, the Gov. Warner Mansion on Grand River, the Masonic Temple on Farmington Road, the Thomas Tussell House on Oakland, the Lapham House on Grand River and the Methodist Children's Home on Oakland.

For more information call Nancy Leonard at 476-4125 or Ruth Moehlman at 626-8264.