

Partnerships Bound for Success: Michigan Festivals & Townships



The hometown parade ... families gazing upward, as fireworks erupt in the night's sky ... crowds perusing booths of local artists' crafts and works ... children running a three-legged race in the township park.

What can make all this happen? A festival or event in your township!

Michigan's community festivals, fairs, special events and destinations are a major element of the Michigan lifestyle and the entire tourism economy throughout the state. These events, as celebrations of local talent and culture, can help to instill pride in your township and may even serve to clarify the community's identity by bringing together the arts of various religions and ethnicities, professional and vocational artists and performing arts groups, school children and others.

Townships, and other local governments and major community contributors, support these events because of their inherent value to the area and economy. Townships across the state have found the benefits of hosting a community festival, including bringing residents together, fostering civic pride and showing off township amenities to residents and nonresidents alike.

WHY HOST A COMMUNITY EVENT?

Local festivals, fairs and cultural events maintain an age-old reputation as a time of feasting and fun, when neighbors join together to celebrate and to invite visitors to view their arts, listen to their music and sometimes join in friendly competition. From early times to modern day, Michigan has welcomed an increasing array of events celebrating bountiful harvests, emphasizing local craftsmanship and savoring a four-season wonderland of recreational and cultural opportunities.

Festivals and special events are staged for many reasons. Besides being informative and enjoyable, they provide a number of important benefits to the township and its community:

- Festivals encourage a sense of community pride and cohesiveness. It's not often that everyone in the township gets invited to the same party. Festivals provide a rare occasion for the whole community to relax and have fun.
- Festivals may have certain educational values. For instance, important historical events can be taken out of the classroom and brought to life through skits, costume contests, re-enactments, and other commemorative events.
- Festivals provide an opportunity to celebrate a township's history and heritage.
- Festivals are ideal occasions for artists and craftspeople to demonstrate and exhibit their skills.

- Festivals provide a showcase for new and traditional ideas in music, art, drama, crafts and sports.
- Festivals focus on the broad spectrum of the state's culture.
- Festivals stimulate travel to a community and the surrounding region. This encourages the community to grow and prosper by attracting dollars in the form of tourism, and in some cases, new industry.
- Festivals can bring a community together through both the planning and the attendance at the event.
- Festivals can also be used to celebrate a holiday, season or an historical event, or to help raise money for local causes.

The key to the success of a township festival is that goals and objectives must be identified and defined. "To celebrate the township and its people" is one umbrella goal.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF AN EVENT

Progressive communities know that to attract and keep larger businesses in their area, they need to show a strong sense of community involvement. Events can help to give the township a more "people-oriented" identity. A festival is one event that the entire family can enjoy. Done well, a festival can be good for every person in the community.

But the benefits of a township-wide event are more far-reaching than simply bringing residents together for an afternoon or week-end of community fun. The color, majesty, sights, sounds and smells of Michigan's festivals, fairs and cultural events attract millions of visitors to our Great Lakes state annually. This, in turn, contributes billions of dollars to the state economy and provides countless jobs in the hospitality industry.

The economic benefits for the township can be significant, with little local expenditure. Township events can:

- Stimulate the local economy and bring capital investment to a community
- Provide a major tourism activity
- Attract new customers to local businesses
- Promote business year-round
- Showcase thousands of artists
- Promote and celebrate Michigan-grown commodities

For a discussion of lawful township expenditures on community festivals, see the August 2007 "Hello, MTA ... ?", or visit MTA's Web site, www.michigantownships.org.

WHERE TO BEGIN

An important step in planning a successful festival or township-wide event is to write objectives or goals for the project. The ►



So You're Going to Have a Festival ...

PLANNING STEPS

Dates—Commit publicly up to three years in advance or establish annual date and hours of operation

Theme—Select your theme [This may also reflect upon your selection of date(s).]

Budget—Obtain written quotes from all suppliers (i.e. printers, entertainment, advertising, supplies, etc.)

Activities—Select activities that your budget can substantiate (Examples: parade, showcase, dance, honors night, home-town night, queen pageant, coronation ball, press night, special events—tug-of-war, pie eating contest, etc.)

Administrative Structure—Job descriptions and requirements; volunteer bank; established workers list

Obtaining Contracts and Permits—Talent; facilities; insurance; liquor license; sign permits; parking permits; security

Sponsors—Request sponsors to provide a written proposal or submit a written proposal to them

Marketing—Advertising; public relations; group sales; sales promotion

On-Site Logistics—Develop check-off list of requirements, set-up week schedule and emergency plan

Presenting Your Festival/Event—Daily administrative meetings; daily check-off list; banking; inventory control; concessions; continuous public relations

Event Wrap-Up—Review demographics; review ticket sales; critique workers' performances; analyze spending; future planning

Say Thanks!—Don't forget to show your appreciation to sponsors and volunteers



'Show What Your Community is All About'

Clinton Charter Township's Festival of the Senses Fine Arts Show

Earlier this year, artist Dennis Valimont was driving through his hometown of **Clinton Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) and got the inspiration to start his own art show. But where would he have it? "Something or somebody guided me to it," he said. "I decided to have it where I live."

Valimont's brainchild has culminated into the first annual Festival of the Senses—A Celebration of the Arts, a weekend-long event in September showcasing multi-media artists and craftspersons.

"The township felt that a fine art festival would be a win-win for all," explained **Mary Ann Hosey**, township administrative aide and township liaison for the festival. "It would not only showcase our community, but provide a wonderful opportunity for residents and visitors alike to see what our township has to offer."

To help cover costs, each artist pays an entry fee for their booth, and area businesses are also sponsoring and donating time and promotion.

Nearly every artist participating in the art fest is from Michigan, with a few from neighboring states who fill an underrepresented artistic arena. "We've got a lot of wonderful artists in our community, but don't even know it. It's a hidden secret," Valimont said. "Townships are sitting on a gold mine, and they don't even know it."

A committee of township officials and employees are helping with organizing the event, and handling issues such as traffic, parking and signage. "There are many logistics involved in this event," Hosey said, noting details from set-up, scheduling of police, fire and emergency services, to coordination of volunteers. "The board is always kept abreast of the progress and is in full support of the festival."

The Festival of the Senses takes place on the township civic center grounds, and also features events at the township library and historical village. The parks and recreation department coordinated children's activities, and the area community theatre even orchestrated short plays, and music and dance performances.

Said Hosey, "This is truly a township event for our community to be proud of."

Echoed Valimont, "Do more than just have a good time. Show what your community is all about."

list of objectives should basically outline what is going to be done, who is going to do it, who will benefit and what specific results are desired.

Having a written list of objectives will help planners keep within the boundaries of their goals, and will help recruit individuals and groups who identify with the planners' specific aims. The list of objectives also is an important evaluation tool—a yardstick by which to measure the event's success. Objectives provide a focus for the entire planning process and should be determined before moving ahead with the project.

Who can help? Anyone! It takes the cooperation and participation of many individuals for an event to be a success. While the idea for an event may start with, or involve, township officials or employees, there's a bounty of possibilities for volunteers right in your own backyard—from individual residents, local chambers of commerce, service organizations or a combination of several groups. A true cross-section of the community should be represented in event leadership positions, on staff, advisory committees, and as volunteers to ensure that programming accurately reflects the community and promotes the event in an appropriate fashion.

Planning an event takes time—from six months to a year, typically—so take advantage of volunteer assistance, establish committees and assign tasks, from soliciting donations to organizing vendors to arranging for entertainment. There is no shortage of assignments to be made.

MARKET YOUR TOWNSHIP

It's not good enough to hold a plain generic festival anymore. The event must have a theme—a main idea or concept to provide a solid base for a variety of interesting activities that are easy to promote. Develop a theme that gives your township's event a unique identity and prevents it from being a carbon copy of other



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events. The theme should reflect the township's personality, legends, natural beauty or other attractions. A theme:

- Gives the event an overall focus
- Gives the participating groups a common point from which they can develop a cohesive program of activities
- Gives the event structure
- Makes publicity much easier

Whatever the theme, it must be something to which the local community can relate, and that is either unique or has enough interest to attract visitors. Why should anyone else buy into your idea or cause? How do you create an event that spans the tastes of many generations? Is the theme workable in many circumstances? Build on what's available in your area—whether it be history, agriculture or a scenic waterway. Capitalize on what makes your township—and your event—special!

Spinning off on the theme idea, an event name can be one of its best selling points. It needs to be catchy, memorable and tied in with the event's theme. There's something to be said for choosing an unusual or even bizarre name; people certainly seem to notice it. The "Irons Ox Market and Flea Roast" resulted when the words "market" and "roast" were transposed. No doubt this festival owes a good deal of its success to a rather uncommon title. ▶

'Benefitting from the Sense of Community Identity'

Hamburg Township Family Fun Fest

This year marked the second annual Hamburg Family Fun Fest, a four-day event that runs over Father's Day weekend in **Hamburg Township** (Livingston Co.). To say the event is packed with activity would be an understatement. It includes: amusement rides, two nights of fireworks, concerts, a comedy show, circus, petting zoo, arts and crafts, car show, antique fire truck show, motorcycle show, poker run, Father's Day pancake breakfast, tribute to veterans, magic acts, local dance school shows, martial arts show—and more!

According to township Clerk **Joanna Hardesty**, the township's involvement is limited to providing the park facility to host the event, and police and fire protection during the festival. The muscle behind event planning is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, the Hamburg Enhanced Recreation Organization (H.E.R.O.). According to Hardesty, who is also H.E.R.O. president, the non-profit's purpose is to support local non-profit organizations that are working on township-approved plans for expanding and improving the park facilities and recreational programs.

"Through the inaugural Hamburg Family Fun Fest, we raised enough money to issue grants to two organizations totaling \$24,000," Hardesty said. "We're still paying bills and evaluating our profits from this year's event, but it appears at this stage that we again will be giving grants to two approved organizations."

The event is no small undertaking, and a host of people work together to make the annual festival a success. "The key to success is finding and working with dedicated, hard-working, committed volunteers," Hardesty said. "Countless hours are spent planning and organizing. Contracts have to be negotiated, entertainment has to be booked, a marketing plan has to be developed, sponsorships have to be acquired, and the list goes on and on. We are not large enough yet to employ help, so we rely completely on our volunteers."

Residents and the local media proclaimed the Family Fun Fest a success, saying that it offers families an enjoyable time and also boosts the local economy. "Local businesses have experienced a spike in sales over the festival weekend," Hardesty said. "They are advertising Fun Fest Specials, participating in the event through sponsorships, and helping to promote it at their place of business."

The real benefit however, according to Hardesty, is "the sense of community identity the festival is responsible for."



'A Little More Oomph to Their Step'

Oscoda Charter Township's Red White & Blue Collar Festival

Two years ago, local leaders in **Oscoda Charter Township** (Iosco Co.) decided to organize a community festival designed to bring tourists heading up north into the township center. What emerged was a three-day event featuring local musical acts, a petting zoo, canoe race and evening fireworks called "the best fireworks display in the north."

"The goal of the festival is to draw people to the area, and get them off the main road, U.S. 23," said Jody Schemanske, executive director of the Oscoda-Au Sable Chamber of Commerce, which coordinates the Red White & Blue Collar Festival. "Oscoda has typically been a 'drive-through' for people who on their way north."

The event brings thousands of attendees—residents and visitors alike—to the township, which then allows the community to showcase all it has to offer. The township park's pavilion is filled with exhibits highlighting the area's draws, including the medical, real estate, educational and forestry arenas. "People were just in awe," Schemanske said. "So many attendees said, 'We had no idea Oscoda has so much to offer.'"

Schemanske advises other townships to do the same. "We capitalized on our national forests and beaches," she said. "When you live in an area, you take it for granted. But when you bring in new people, and showcase your area, they are in awe."

The summertime festival has had ripple-effects throughout the rest of the year. "The Red White & Blue Festival really started the ball rolling," Schemanske said. "Everyone around town is walking with a little more 'oomph' to their step."

The community hosted its first lighted Christmas parade in 2006—the participation and attendance were "amazing," Schemanske raved. The downtown area now has a beautification committee that plants flowers in the springtime. Area businesses are getting into the spirit, sprucing up their buildings with new paint jobs. "The pride is returning," Schemanske said.

WHEN TO HOST?

Timing is another important element to consider when planning an event. What time of year, or on what date, should the event be held to best meet the objectives and purposes for which it was organized? On what dates will the event least conflict with other local programs or those of nearby communities? What other programs could be incorporated into a new event? Three nearby events may be more attractive to tourists than one. How long should the event last—several hours, one day, several days or more?

The weather is a key factor and one which you cannot control. However, by playing the averages, event organizers can pick a time with a reasonably good chance of acceptable weather. Look over the weather trends and plan accordingly.

From the beginning, set an alternate "rain date" or alternate indoor site in the event that bad weather forces a change. Likewise, a lack of snow for winter festivals also requires a contingency plan.

GET STARTED!

The purpose, theme, name and date are crucial items for any festival, but the work is just getting started once these matters

are settled. The budget must be drafted, entertainment planned, and publicity coordinated. The same goes for security, food and beverage sales, and sanitation facilities.

While the concept of planning a township festival sounds like—and is—a lot of hard work, the end result and rewards to the community can be immeasurable. Festivals and events can help build and promote your township, give residents and visitors alike a new-found appreciation for your area, and help increase the visibility and vitality of the place you call home.

Sue Bila, Executive Director, Michigan Festivals and Events Association, Chesaning

She can be reached at (989) 845-2080 or via e-mail at bilas@mfea.org.

For more information, visit www.michiganfun.us



Want to learn more about hosting a community festival? Plan on attending "Bringing Events to Your Township," an educational session at MTA's 2008 Annual Educational Conference, Jan. 8-11, in Detroit! Refer to the registration brochure in the center of this issue of Michigan Township News.

'Bringing the Whole Community Together'

Banks Township's Ellsworth Pig Roast

In 1981, a **Banks Township** (Antrim Co.) resident group wanted to celebrate the successful completion of a renovation project—and the annual community pig roast began.

Township Clerk **Donna Heeres**, who was part of that inaugural committee, has helped plan the Ellsworth Pig Roast for all but five of its 27-year history. Each year, the township board recognizes the committee, and passes a resolution granting the authority to the committee to plan the pig roast. For its part, the township sponsors an event—this year, it sponsored the annual parade. The fire department also assists with traffic control during the 5K "fun run" and horse pull. They periodically demonstrate use of the "jaws of life" and other equipment for the spectators.

"There is a huge amount of cooperation that goes into planning this," Heeres said. "The village of Ellsworth, located in the township, also gets involved, sponsoring events, and providing picnic tables, trash cleanup and police to provide security."

This year, the committee also worked with the neighboring City of East Jordan, whose annual Freedom Fest has taken place the same weekend as the pig roast. "Rather than compete, we worked together," Heeres said. "We included their information in our mailing, and they included ours. We put a link to their Web site on our Web page and vice versa." The township even got the Internet service provider that hosts the township Web site to donate space for the pig roast Web site, www.ellsworthpigroast.com.

"The whole event brings the community together," Heeres said. "We strive to make it a community event. Yes, we want to bring people in, but our No. 1 goal is for the community."

This year's event theme celebrated the area's centennial farms. In addition, the area historical society got involved, opening the museum for visits and hosting a trolley tour with 30 points of interest throughout the area. The event includes free games for kids, a horse pull, a fishing contest for adults and kids alike, even a free movie night that this year featured a showing of *Charlotte's Web*.

"We're promoting our community," Heeres said. "We're promoting *us*, and trying to make memories for our kids."