Sunny Skies Attract Thousands At Iris Festival



SUN PHOTO BY KEN LITTLE

Face-painting was a popular activity for kids at this weekend's Iris Festival. Emmalyn Martin, 5, enjoys her face-painting session as mom Jessica Martin looks on. Artist Renya Moss, of Knoxville, said business was brisk throughout the weekend.

Car Show, Lots Of Entertainment, Festival Food Highlight Event

BY KEN LITTLE
STAFF WRITER

Fun was in full bloom this weekend as the Greene County Partnership's 24th annual Iris Festival flourished under mostly sunny skies.

For many in the sizable crowd that attended, it was the variety of food. Others came for the music and other stage entertainment, or the variety of crafts and art items for for sale. Kids enjoyed the face painting, while many adults replenished their gardens with iris bulbs.

Whatever the reason, the Iris Festival in downtown Greeneville attracted an estimated 8,500 people Saturday and Sunday from across the region. A key factor was the agreeable weather, as

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SUN PHOTO BY KEN LITTLE

Emily Johnson, 11, of Greenville, looks over a weather-worn 1950 Ford pickup truck Saturday at the Iris Festival.

FESTIVAL

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threatened rain gave way to sunny skies.

Myka Stephens, 7, said the face painting booth was a personal highlight.

"She likes the face painting," said mother Laura Stephens, who enjoyed looking at the variety of iris bulbs for sale.

"I always like looking at the jewelry," added Stephens, who came to the festival from Jonesborough with her daughter.

One of the most popular features of the event was the "Sundown on Depot Car Show," which features dozens of eye-catching cars and trucks. A DJ played classic rock and roll songs that dated to when some of the cars were new.

Danny Drennon stood next to his 1948 Mercury Eight sedan.

"It's a good car, solid as a rock," the Russellville resident said.

Drennon said he and his wife, Marie, attend the Iris Festival most years.

"The cars are what I like and my wife likes all the places to shop," he said.

The Mercury can be purchased for $15,000.

"You don't see many '48 Mercurys around," Drennon said.

Ricky Parton stood next to a fire-engine red 1932 Ford coupe street rod, which he created for a customer. His business, Parton's Hot Rods, has been located on Summer Street in Greeneville since moving here last fall from Newport. It was his first Iris Festival car show.

A COMMUNITY EVENT

"We try to participate in any event we can, especially the fundraiser kind of events," Parton said. "It's good when the community comes together."

Parton was an officer with the Newport Police Department for nine years, "so the children are especially near and dear to my heart," he said.

All proceeds from the "Sundown on Depot" Car Show benefitted the Holston United Methodist Home for Children.

The effort is much appreciated, said Susan Bernier, who works in the Holston Home development office.

"We use (donations) in every event aspect of the kids' lives from day to day. It all goes to the kids," Bernier said.

It was hot Saturday, and many festival-goers sought out a patch of shade after walking for a while. Phil and Elizabeth Shelton of Greeneville were each enjoying a cup of ice cream under a tree on Depot Street.

"We're just looking around and people watching and looking at the exhibits. There's a lot of things around here to look at and the food court, of course," Phil Shelton said.

Vendor Benson Southerland was working in the Creamy Cup stand on Depot Street near the vintage vehicles. He was occupied dispensing ice cream to customers.

"It was slow at first and then the sun came out, and we've been extremely busy since then," Southerland said. "The ice cream is starting to melt a little. I hope we last the rest of the day."

Ron and LeAnne Dressler were looking at the cars along Depot Street while pushing a stroller with their 14-month-old granddaughter Maleigha Dalton aboard.

"She's enjoying the ride," Ron Dressler said.

The Dresslers said that in addition to checking out the cars, they like looking at the wares being sold at the Iris Festival.

"We like the vendors and the booths and the camaraderie with the people," Ron Dressler said.

Emily Johnson, 11, was inspecting a rusty 1950 Ford pickup truck along Depot Street with the words "Genuine Rat" painted on the door.

She was with her family from Greeneville. To Johnson, the old cars were just the appetizer to what she really likes about the festival.

"The funnel cakes and the chicken on a stick," she said.

On the other side of Depot Street, 5-year-old Emmalyn Martin sat still while a design was painted on her face as mom Jessica Martin watched.

"She likes having her face painted," said Jessica Martin, who came to the festival with her daughter from the South Greene community.

Makenzey Finnerty, 7, also enjoyed the face painting experience "and the ice cream," mother Ashley Andrukonis said.

Knoxville artist Reyna Moss was doing the face painting from her busy booth on Depot Street.

"I like the people, all the different people," Moss said between brush strokes.

Dad Stephen Crum carried his 5-year-old son Gunner on his shoulders up Depot Street, accompanied by his 10-year-old son Gavin.

The Greeneville family attends the Iris Festival every year, Stephen Crum said.

"I like the wood creations," Gavin Crum said. "We like to see what kind of neat things they got."

VISITORS DRAWN DOWNTOWN

Many people were gathered Saturday in the area of the food court, near the festival's "singing stage" where musical groups were performing.

Mayor W.T. Daniels was speaking with several festival-goers near the entertainment stage. He pronounced the 2018 Iris Festival a success.

"I think it's going extremely well. I'm glad to see the rain has held off so far," Daniels said. "I think all the food vendors are doing well, and of course the car show is always a big hit. I think it's really good to draw people downtown. That's really important."

Along College and Academy streets, vendors were doing brisk business. The "My Mountain Flower" booth featured homemade goat millet lye soap and polymer clay jewelry. Vendor Mike Allen of Kingsport said it was the sixth year at the Iris Festival.

"We love it here," Allen said. "It's a good group of people out here and with the vendors, we meet new people."

The "Create A Candle" booth, at the festival for the first year, attracted both children and adults.

"We're doing pretty good. This is fun for all ages," said booth operator Ronald Lambert, of Murphy, North Carolina.

"I had a man 88 years old who just made a candle. It was red, white and blue for America," Allen said.

Eight-year-old Izzy Terrell was concentrating on decorating a candle while her grandmother, LaRaine Sullivan, looked on.

"We're visiting from Florida. My daughter lives here," Sullivan said. "I think this is very nice."

Booths selling iris bulbs were popular too.

"It's going really good. The weather's really good an you couldn't ask for a better day," Greeneville Iris Society member Rose Russell said.

"They just love them. There's so many different varieties," Russell said.

Ray Whitney, wearing a Vietnam veteran cap with a small American flag attached, stood on the side of College Street and watched the people pass by. Whitney has lived in Greeneville for two years and it was his first Iris Festival.

"It's just a different kind of day. I got a bite to eat and it was pretty good," Whitney said.

IRIS FESTIVAL PAGEANT

Also on Saturday, the 15th annual Miss Iris Festival Pageant was held at the Capitol Theatre. Co-directors Linda Williams, Rhonda Humber and Diane Price oversaw the pageant for the Greene County Partnership.

Participants enjoyed themselves, Williams said.

Winner of the Miss Iris Fest Queen 2018 is Angel Bobadilla, 18-year-old daughter of Susie and Antonio Bobadilla of Greeneville. She was also Miss Iris Fest Queen in 2017.

Angel also won the prettiest smile, prettiest dress, casual wear, western wear and most photogenic categories in her age division.

Queen of the newborn- to 11-month-old category is 9-month-old Cambree McAmis of Bulls Gap, daughter of Taylor and Colleen McAmis.

Queen in the 12- to 23-month-old category is Neylan Davis, 16-month-old daughter of Kristi Harris and Nick Davis of Greeneville. Neylan also won Casual West and Western Wear honors in her age division.

Queen in the 2- to 3-year-old category is 3-year-old Carrington Ramsey, of Morristown. Carrington, daughter of Marshall and Sjeree Ramsey also won Casual West and Western Wear honors in her age division, and was also winner of the High Point Award for highest overall score in the pageant.

The People's Choice Award went to 2-year-old Lillian Waddell, daughter of Scotty and Lena Waddell of Greeneville. The award was voted on by the audience as their favorite.

The queen in the 6- to 8-year-old category is Kara Cretsinger, daughter of Keith and Angela Cretsinger from Jonesborough. Kara was also winner in the prettiest smile, prettiest dress, casual wear and western wear categories in her age division.

The queen in the 11- to 12-year old age division is Jaceerae Carr, 12, daughter of James and Whitney Carr of Johnson City. Jaceerae also won the prettiest smile, prettiest dress, casual wear, western wear and most photogenic categories in her age division.

PLENTY OF ENTERTAINMENT

A succession of groups and individuals performed on the Singing Stage over the weekend near the food court. One was Melanie Ragon, 17, an honor roll student who will be a senior this year at West Greene High School.

An appreciative crowd gave Ragon a loud round of applause Saturday afternoon after her performance.

"I really enjoyed it. I've been singing since I was 3," Ragon said.

It was the first year Ragon performed at the Iris Festival. She took the audience watching her in stride.

"Before you (go on stage), you're always nervous but with the help of the good Lord above I got through it and I'm not nervous now," Ragon said.

The Evergreene Woodcarvers competition and sale took place both days of the festival in the First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall.

Talented woodcarvers and sculptors from six states brought their wood sculptures. Several hundred sculptures were displayed.

Within each skill division there were 31 categories of sculpture competition such as animals, aquatic life, song birds, birds of prey, water fowl, human figures and human caricatures.

Pam Mulinix of the Cherokee Lake community in Hawkins County studied an ornate carving of a group of elephants.

"It's good. I like this. I know it took a long time (to create)," said Mulinix, whose husband, Don Hills, is a member of the Evergreen Woodcarvers club.

Sponsors for festival entertainment included Rodefer Moss, ServPro, Consumer Credit Union, First Tennessee Bank, and McInturff, Milligan & Brooks.

Sponsors of the car show included Greeneville Federal Bank, Landair, A1 Auto Paint, Jerry's Used Cars & Parts, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Gary's Paint & Body, RPC Coatings, Bewley Properties, Jeffers Mortuary and Cremation Services, Park House Antiques, Beamers Home Improvement, and Wilburn Excavating & Construction.

Major sponsors of the festival are Parker Hannifin, Eastman Credit Union, The Greeneville Sun and Radio Greeneville.



SUN PHOTO BY KEN LITTLE

Makenzey Finnerty, 7, holds still as artist Reyna Moss applies the finishing touches in Moss' face-painting booth Saturday at the Iris Festival.