

Wheatfield Family picnic called town's 'biggest day of the year'



BY KAREN CARR KEEFE
Senior Contributing Writer

The 43rd annual Wheatfield Family Picnic this Sunday, Aug. 6, at Fairmount Park is considered by the organizer as the highlight of the summer for the town.

The event runs from noon to 5 p.m. at the park, at the corner of Nash and Steig roads.

Mike Zarbo said came on board as chair of the event 12 years ago at the request of the former supervisor, Robert Cliffe.

The first year he held the reins, 15 people responded to an ad and volunteered to be on the picnic planning committee. This year, it has dwindled to four hard-working and dedicated volunteers.

Zarbo said, "I greatly appreciate their help. The committee is still looking for volunteers to help with the picnic."

This year's lineup is chock full of family events such as a plant sale, a classic car show by Wheels of Wheatfield, a magician, games, pony rides, hayrides, a petting zoo, dunk tank, rock climbing wall, music by the Bergholz Band, food and entertainment for the whole family.

Everything except the food is free. The Wheatfield Garden Club plant sale also starts at noon and will feature mums and a wide variety of perennials donated by local greenhouses.

The day begins with a flag-raising ceremony at 10:45 a.m., and Catholic and Protestant church services at 11 a.m.

Starting out a dozen years ago, Zarbo said, "We started doing fund-raising and, very quickly, the businesses in town jumped right on the bandwagon, and the rest is history. We exist because of the generous support of the local businesses here in the Town of Wheatfield and we're very thrilled to have their consistent support."

"We have several very large sponsors who help us consistently every year." One of those is Colton RV. "They have consistently sponsored our car show from the inception of it." In all, there are 16 additional sponsors listed



who support the event.

Zarbo said tradition is upheld in "having the church services early on and the flag-raising early on, along with the Pledge of Allegiance and, of course, we play the national anthem while we're raising the flag. We're proud of who we are, we're proud of this town and we believe that having the religious services at the picnic is part of a family event."

He said the Niagara Alliance Church has been very active in the picnic right from the beginning. Holly Ann Piazza from that church, as picnic committee secretary, is one of the four active volunteers on the picnic committee. The other two, besides Zarbo and Piazza, are Jim Heuer, vice chairman; and Mike Ranalli, the committee's recreation director.

Rita Kontak said the Wheatfield Garden Club is doing some much-needed fundraising with a plant sale that starts at noon at the picnic.

"The Garden Club buys all the

plants that are around the town campus and the two gardens at Fairmount Park," she said.

The group will also be providing the planters at the Welcome to Wheatfield signs. The Garden Club receives town reimbursement to help with those purchases, but the club also supports a speakers program on gardening topics of interest that help the members keep up with planting techniques and trends for their town projects.

Among other family-oriented events at the picnic: a kids carnival, games and there's also a "balloon lady" who comes in, Zarbo said.

"It's really a fun event," he noted. "We also have another area that's called KidsFest, where we have a bounce house, there's crafts ... a book exchange and a bean bag toss."

Zarbo said that, when Cliffe retired as town supervisor, "he made mention of the fact that he felt it was the biggest day of the year for the Town of Wheatfield."

IN THE NEWS

Niagara County to host Purple Heart ceremony this Sunday

Submitted by the Public Information Officer

Niagara County Clerk Joseph A. Jastrzemski invites the public to attend this Sunday's Purple Heart ceremony at 1 p.m. at the Niagara County Courthouse in Lockport, where more than 109 individuals will be added to the county's Purple Heart Book.

The Purple Heart is awarded to those wounded or killed as a result of enemy action while serving in the U.S. military. Currently, there are more than 300 names in the county's Purple Heart Book.

This event will also see the unveiling of the new Purple Heart Monument on the front lawn of the courthouse. Rocky Bleier, a Purple Heart veteran and four-time Super Bowl winner with the Pittsburgh Steelers, will deliver the keynote address. After the event, Bleier will also be hosting a signing of his book, "Fighting Back." The renowned Tonawanda American Legion Band will also perform, starting around 12:30 p.m.

The Niagara County Courthouse is located at 175 Hawley St., Lockport.

There will be handicap parking in the courthouse lot, with additional parking across the street. Seating will be available for honorees. Others attending are en-

couraged to bring their own lawn chairs.

Air Base to host free concert to celebrate 75th anniversary of Air Force Reserve

The 914th Air Refueling Wing is scheduled to host a free concert from 5:30-7 p.m. Aug. 24. The free event will be open to the public; however, seating is limited and only those with tickets will be allowed access. For tickets, go to www.NiagaraFSS.com.

"This year, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Air Force Reserve and, while this event gives us the opportunity to publicly recognize this major milestone, we would also like to salute the entire Western New York military community, past and present," said Col. Joseph Contino, 914 ARW commander.

NCLEA graduation

The Niagara County Law Enforcement Academy announced the 80th class of the basic course for police graduation will take place at noon Friday, Aug. 25, in the theater located in F Building at Niagara County Community College, 3111 Saunders Settlement Road, in Sanborn.

Attendees are encouraged to park in lot No. 1.

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