

# Numerous planning issues spurred Kiwanis to cancel Peach Festival

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"After input from members and much discussion among the board, it was determined that any and all activities related to the Peach Festival would be cancelled this year," he said.

Planning for this spectacular annual fall event has become a complicated process in itself, with countless club members and committee meetings typically held from late fall to the following January and throughout the year. The annual festival – the marquee event for the Lewiston Kiwanis Club – draws an estimated 35,000 visitors from throughout Western New York to Lewiston's Academy Park. It has become a favorite of many, with its offerings of fresh Niagara County peaches; the grand midway of games, rides and dozens of vendors; numerous community events, including youth cheerleading competitions, a 5K benefit run, a mammoth Saturday morning parade down Center Street, entertainment, youth events, the annual peach cobbler taste-off, the Peach Fuzz and Peach Blossom contests, and the signature highlight: crowning a Niagara County Peach Queen.

All of this – as has been the case with countless other happenings throughout the country – was scrapped due to the coronavirus.

For Kiwanis, the decision of whether or not to hold the Peach Festival amounted to a number of painful discussions.

"We've all had our opinions on what we could or should do," Beltrano said.

He explained that included the Midway of America midway providers, who after backing out of other regional events in the Northeast due to COVID-19 concerns, also decided to back away from the Peach Festival this year. The Kiwanis Club explored the possibility of replacement providers, but organizers found those members spoke to would be unable to meet the club's expectations of what it takes to operate the four-day festival.

Then came another whole host



Lewiston will be without the majestic Peach Festival "skyline" this summer. The Kiwanis Club decided to cancel the annual event due to restrictions related to the coronavirus. (File photo by K&D Action Photo and Aerial Imaging)

of logistical concerns that are a part of holding a festival of this caliber and size – led by the question of having adequate electrical power to run the festival. With Midway of America out this year, there would be no electrical generators coming to Academy Park, and Kiwanis was left scrambling for power source replacements to light and operate the festival.

"Without the ride company and the generators, we would (have) to rent our own generators, or plug into the village power and pay them for whatever they tell us what the electric bill is. Those are (among) the things that we looked at," Beltrano said. "At this point, we (would) need to go back to the village to amend our (contract for) use of the field. And there is no guarantee that they are going to approve it."

Compounding the question over power was the uncertainty of even having Academy Park facilities available for holding the Peach Festival events. Just recently, the aged cement and steel

grandstand complex facing the DiMino's stage in the northwest park corner was demolished, and plans are in place to relocate the stage to the park's south side. This posed major problems for Kiwanis organizers and their entertainment plans.

"So, the grandstand is gone, the stage is there. We have no idea on what the timeline (for) who is moving the stage is, when it is going to be done. We don't know if it's going to be safe for stage events, which was another reason why we cancelled," Beltrano said.

This meant no stage events, including the Thursday night concert, the Friday youth cheerleading events, the Saturday Peach Taste-off and nighttime Elvis show, the Blossom and Fuzz competitions, the Peach Queen events or Sunday night crowning ceremonies.

"The Peach Queen, Fuzz and Blossom have all agreed to stay on for another year," Beltrano said.

"Yes – the Queen/Blossom and Fuzz will all remain onboard through next year!" said competition organizer Jennifer Pauly, president of the Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce. "They have not been able to carry

out their year this year and we decided to keep them on so they would be able to take part (hopefully) in activities, programs and promotions they normally do!

"It would be very hard to hold any type of program this year while keeping the integrity of the entire program."

Another issue was the all-volunteer labor required to create and run a festival of this size. The Niagara County Sheriff's Office inmate work details from the Niagara County Jail would not be coming this year due to the virus. Neither would the throngs of community service volunteers – oftentimes area youth assigned by the courts – that, for years, have worked throughout the festival and provide valuable help to Kiwanis.

"With a lot of things that are going on (at this festival) there are things we have to look at ... who is going to clean the portapotties, how often do they have to be cleaned and who is going to do it; who is going to change the garbage – again, we have no community service (or) the sheriff's work detail (to do this)," Beltrano said.

And then there are the vendors, literally dozens of them from

throughout Western and Central New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio who already submitted deposits to be a part of the festival. Many expressed concerns and doubts about attending due to the virus and health and safety factors.

Still yet another concern was the processing issues associated with the serving of fresh Niagara County peaches at the event. Beltrano said the club has been in discussions with regional providers that would enable the club to continue to utilize its Singer Farms peaches, but this had not been finalized for 2020.

Beltrano said that, all along, the club's legal and financial consultants advised the board against holding this year's festival at all. Despite that, he said Kiwanis organizers, after hearing the pleas and urgings of its membership, considered over past weeks how to still make a go out of this year's festival. This event, after all, provides funds for myriad local organizations, nonprofits and educational scholarships.

In fact, since 1958, the Niagara County Peach Festival has raised well over \$1 million in goods and donations for area charities and organizations from event proceeds.

Considered among the many suggestions were the holding of an expanded version of Saturday morning's popular farmers market at Academy Park with the availability of a drive-thru peach cobbler tent, the holding of youth and community events as part of lighter festival activities on the park site, and the holding of virtual events before, during and after the festival's timeframe.

He said the board considered all these factors, but amidst the uncertainties that continue with the coronavirus, decided against holding the Peach Fest altogether this year.

"The board believed there were too many unknowns for us to take a chance. While we understand everyone may not agree with this decision, it is believed to the best one for the club going forward," Beltrano said.

He noted planning for the 2021 Niagara County Peach Festival would soon be getting underway. More information can be found at [www.lewistonpeachfestival.org](http://www.lewistonpeachfestival.org).

## Village of Lewiston meeting will be virtual

July 20 session closed to public, available online with Zoom

Monday's Village of Lewiston Board of Trustees meeting will be conducted via Zoom. Resi-

dents will not be permitted to participate in person.

Trustees previously announced board meetings would reopen to the public.

This decision to revert back to an online forum came upon consultation with legal counsel, and noted the cleaning procedures required following this week's Planning Commission and Historic Preservation Commission gath-

erings in the Red Brick Municipal Building gymnasium.

The Zoom meeting link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7167548271>, while the meeting ID is 716 754 8271.

A public hearing is scheduled at the beginning of the 6 p.m. meeting regarding a resolution to adopt a local law whereby a \$10 surcharge would be added to the water bill each cycle. Funds would go toward capital water and sewer improvements.

Mayor Anne Welch said a second scheduled public hearing, this one pertaining to the adoption of a local law wherein Juneteenth would be added as an official holiday, is canceled until further notice. More time is needed to ascertain whether or not prior state directives recognizing this day apply to village employees.



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