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Block Party brings thousands to Hopatcong State Park

Lake Hopatcong Foundation event benefits from sunny spring skies

Landing, NJ (May 13, 2019) - Lake Hopatcong, NJ - More than 4,000 people, including a couple hundred volunteers, made their way to Hopatcong State Park on Saturday, May 11, for the sixth annual Lake Hopatcong Block Party.

Previously plagued by poor weather, organizers were thrilled to finally hold their event without the threat of rain. Jessica Murphy, president of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation, which hosts the event, was among the most thankful.

"Despite bad weather in the past the event has gone well, but we've always wondered how successful it would be if we had a nice day," said Murphy, whose party attire included sunglasses and a T-shirt. "We don't have to wonder anymore. The vibe has been upbeat with non-stop energy and enthusiasm."

There were some weather concerns shortly after daybreak as volunteers and vendors worked to set up the park for the party. They fought persistent winds that sent papers flying and tossed framed canopies across the pavement like tumbleweeds.

Things calmed down by the time guests began to arrive, some pulling their cars into spots at the park, with others showing up on shuttle buses from a handful of remote locations.

Among the latter was Mike Wester of Hopatcong, who stepped off a bus with daughter Aubrey, 7, and 3-year-old twins Michael and Ella. He was on hand to support his mother-in-law, a real estate agent manning one of nearly 200 vendor booths at the Block Party.

“I’ve been here a couple of times in the past,” said Wester. “It’s a really nice day and I know there are a bunch of things to do with the kids.”

Piped-in pop music, a children’s zone and a succession of special performances kept everyone engaged. Attractions included Irish step dancing, live jazz, robotics, exotic reptiles, trackless train rides and trained falcons. Dogs also had their day in a parade of costumed canines.

“Anyone who attended the Block Party had a chance to experience a true sense of community,” said Lee Moreau, a veteran organizer of the annual event. “It takes hundreds of people working together to host it so thousands of guests can enjoy it. Everyone shares in the success.”

Barry Newkirk was enjoying the party with wife, Kelly O’Malley, and held the string on a red balloon for his 5-year-old daughter, Aubrey, as she tackled a large cup of rainbow ice. It was the first Block Party for the Hopatcong family, who had seen a banner and an electric sign, touting the event.

“This gave us something fun to do on a nice day. Aubrey likes the train ride and the food,” he said, glancing at his daughter as she focused on her frozen treat. “She really likes to eat.”

Nearby, new Landing resident Cheryl Dean and her proudly Polish mother, Phyllis Gomulka of Old Bridge, stood in line at the sausage stand.

Dean’s son, coincidentally, is part of the crew from O’Donnell Construction in Mt. Arlington, which has been renovating the former Lake Hopatcong train station. The 1911 building is the new home of the LHF offices and its Environmental and Cultural Center.

“My mother is visiting for the weekend so I thought this would be a good way to spend some time,” said Dean, who learned about the event on Facebook. “Also, I just moved into Landing from Colonia a year and a half ago, so [the Block Party] is giving me a chance to see what the area has to offer.”

With the sun still shining at the end of the afternoon, vendors began breaking down their booths and guests slowly made their way to the exit. Volunteers pulled down banners and picked up trash as shadows lengthened on the grassy hillsides of the state park.

This was Cindy Meibach’s fifth year as a Block Party volunteer. The Mt. Arlington resident had spent hours with a few other volunteers stationed at the front gate.

“I like being outside, greeting people and welcoming them to an event like this on a great day,” said Meibach. “I love the lake and the [Lake Hopatcong] Foundation—what it believes in, what it stands for and what it does.”

The Lake Hopatcong Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to protecting the lake environment and enhancing the lake experience by bringing together public and private resources to encourage a culture of sustainability and stewardship on and around New Jersey's largest lake, for this and future generations. To learn more, visit lakehopatcongfoundation.org.

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More than 4,000 people made their way to Hopatcong State Park on Saturday, May 11, for the 2019 Lake Hopatcong Block Party. Photo courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.



Nearly 200 vendors gathered at Hopatcong State Park for the 2019 Lake Hopatcong Block Party. Photo courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.



Rizzo's Reptile Discovery entertained and educated kids of all ages at the 2019 Lake Hopatcong Block Party. Photo courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.



Star Wars characters from the 501st Legion were on hand for photo opportunities at the 2019 Lake Hopatcong Block Party. Photo courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.



An Clár School of Irish Dance of Stanhope charmed onlookers with their performances at the 2019 Lake Hopatcong Block Party. Photo courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.