

Block party celebrates the lake, not the snake

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Photo by Jake West / New Jersey Herald - The Lake Hopatcong community comes together to celebrate and support the lake, hosted by the Lake Hopatcong Foundation, at Hopatcong State Park, on Saturday in Roxbury.

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ROXBURY — As she greeted guests at the Lake Hopatcong Block Party on Saturday, Hopatcong Mayor Sylvia Petillo reached into a bucket and handed out mini snake-in-the-lake gummy worms.

This brought back memories from last summer when police received a tip about an anaconda near Capp Beach, and the Lake Hopatcong Marine Unit of State Police searched the area but found no snake. The news of the snake went viral and was the talk of the local area.

No snakes were visible Saturday as the Lake Hopatcong Foundation hosted its second annual block party at Hopatcong State Park to help celebrate the lake and all that it has to offer.

“The most wonderful part is we all work together,” Petillo said. “It’s a great way to start off the summer.”

The event started off cloudy, but that didn’t stop the crowds. Because of the large number of people, off-site parking was needed.

There were 221 booths, 80 more than last year, said Lauren Rossi, development director of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation. The volunteers doubled from 40 to 80 this year to help make the event a success.

“The only thing that is not working in our favor is the weather, but what can you do?” Rossi said.

Todd Stevens, owner of Bob’s Canoes and Kayaks, had a booth managed by his wife, Barbara, while he stayed at his store. Stevens used to work at the store as a kid and eventually bought the store in 1993, his wife said.

“This event creates awareness in the community,” Barbara Stevens said. “People will come up to you and ask, ‘Oh, where are you located?’ and will start a conversation from there.” They expect to attend the event next year as well.

An 18-passenger family-friendly train was available for rides, allowing guests to relax and get an in-depth view of the park, while following the park trail.

Guests had the opportunity to sign up for boat rides from local marinas and the boat Miss Lotta of Lake Hopatcong Cruises. With limited space, guests could sign up for any open time slot for a short boat ride.

Children and even some adults ran through floating bubbles that piled higher than themselves. Carol Bink, of Hopatcong, stood next to the bubble makers, smiling as her granddaughter enjoyed the seemingly endless bubbles. The state park is only a short walk from their house.

“It’s a chance for us to enjoy the park before all of the city people arrive,” Bink said.

One of the goals of this event is to have people donate money to help maintain the quality of the largest lake in New Jersey.

Artist Greg Hildebrandt does his part to help out the lake. As a current Lake Hopatcong resident, he used his talent to create a painting that was auctioned off last year, raising \$18,500. He hopes to exceed that amount this year at the Lake Hopatcong Foundation Gala and Auction on July 18.

"It's my gift to them," Hildebrandt said.

Hildebrandt's career has spanned more than 50 years. He's done a variety of projects, from the original "Star Wars" movie poster to artwork for the Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

This event brings the community together, from the four towns surrounding the lake — Hopatcong, Jefferson, Mount Arlington and Roxbury — to the local businesses and various nonprofit organizations, said Marty Kane, board chairman of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation.

"There is a lot to be proud of," Petillo said. "The expectation is to showcase what's going on around the lake and local towns, as well as comparing the area's history from the old against the new."