

Event smells, tastes like chicken

BRIAN MANZULLO
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Tom H. Conzelmann remembers the days at the Frankenmuth Bavarian Festival when people would try to jump the Cass River on a motorcycle and shimmy up poles inside the tents.

The 69-year-old Frankenmuth resident, who served as Bavarian Festival chairman in 1968 and has attended the

event since 1961, reminisced over past traditions and activities while preparing a grill Friday afternoon at Heritage Park.

He said some people would just have a little too much to drink during the festival's earlier days.

"Some motorcycle people would camp here overnight, build themselves a ramp and see if they could go across the river like

Evil Knievel," Conzelmann said with a laugh. "And of course that wouldn't work — they couldn't even get to the middle of the river."

Frankenmuth resident Richard G. Krafft, who has participated in the half-century-old festival since the beginning, also remembers the motorcyclists.

"When they started coming, we were concerned about them being disruptive and starting brawls," Krafft said. "It turned out totally the opposite. They helped out when we needed it, and every year, they'd just sacrifice an old motorcycle."

The Bavarian Festival, toned down and celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, runs until Sunday, with most events at Heritage Park near the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

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Bavarian fun



The 50th annual Frankenmuth Bavarian Festival is under way. Here is the schedule:

TODAY

■ 10 a.m. — Children's parade, Main Street downtown

■ 11 a.m. — Rotary's "Das Grosse Enten Rennen" (The Great Duck Race)

At the Sommer Garten; free admission

■ Noon to 7 p.m. — Jaycees chicken dinners

■ Noon to 4 p.m. — Kinder tag and pie eating contest

■ Noon to 4 p.m. — German beverage sampling

■ 1 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. — Magician

■ 1:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. — Joel Zwerk & Melody Magic

■ 2 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. — Maypole Dancers

■ 3:15 p.m. to 4 p.m. — Joel Zwerk & Melody Magic

■ 4:15 p.m. to 5 p.m. — Maypole Dancers

■ 5:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. — Magician

■ 6:15 p.m. to 7 p.m. — Joel Zwerk & Melody Magic

■ 7 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. — Magician

■ 7:45 p.m. to 9 p.m. — Joel Zwerk & Melody Magic

Dance Pavilion

■ 4 p.m. to midnight — Bands, admission \$7

SUNDAY

■ 1 p.m. — Bavarian Parade on Main downtown, rain or shine

■ 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. — Amusement rides, Herzog Platz

Sommer Garten

2:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. — Free admission

■ 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. — American Legion chicken dinners, Maypole Dancers

Dance Pavilion

■ 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. — Music by Enzian, free admission

The three will ride together during the parade Sunday on Main in Frankenmuth.

Krafft said his granddaughter, Maria Krafft, 23, was on the court last year.

"It's an exciting thing — a lot of girls aspire for it," he said. "They represent the city for a whole year by going to parades and other functions." ♦

Brian Manzullo is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9724.

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Krafft said he remembers making valuable friendships while doing small jobs such as fixing pipes or digging ditches.

"You would work with people you never knew before," said Krafft, 78, who also served as Bavarian Festival chairman in 1973. "By the end of it, you'd have made some good friends that you keep over the years.

"You would see faces from Milwaukee or Pittsburgh that would come out every single year."

William "Tiny" Zehnder started the Bavarian Festival in the parking lot of Zehnder's Hotel in 1959, Krafft said, after hosting a grand opening celebration at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant, 713 S. Main, in the 1950s.

"Everybody had such a good time at the first celebration, so he did it again," Krafft said.

"Then the community took it on and it turned into a big thing from there."

The annual event, which spanned seven days, moved to Heritage Park in the early 1970s, Conzelmann said, because it outgrew the parking lots on Main.

The festival typically consisted of a parade, German bands, the annual Bavarian Princess coronation and games, all of which continue today.

The festival switched to a four-day weekend celebration in the late 1990s, Conzelmann said, because of a decrease in weekend popularity.

Bavarian Princess

Kasey Gugel, 21, daughter of George and Gaylene Gugel, wears the crown as this year's Bavarian Princess.

Her court includes Elizabeth Rummel, 20, daughter of William and Annette Rummel; and Kelsey Mayer, 18, daughter of Frederick and Tammy Mayer. A panel of media and celebrity judges made the decision Thursday.

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