SIMPLY THE FEST



This year's Seneca Fest brought in thousands of people to Norton Thompson Park in downtown Seneca over the weekend. People enjoyed free fair rides, crafts, food and live music performances.

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

5/26/15

Crowds flock to Seneca for Memorial Day weekend

'It was just a party from Friday night all the way till Saturday night.'

Riley Johnson
Seneca events coordinator

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — As one of the few Memorial Day weekend festivals left in the Upstate, the attractions at Seneca Fest brought in visitors by the thousands over the weekend.

Seneca events coordinator Riley Johnson said more than 3,000 people came to the two-day festival, which offered classic cars, food, fair rides, crafts, historic tours, local musical performances and headlining act Jefferson Starship.

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To see more photos from this weekend's Seneca Fest celebration, turn to page **B6**.

"All in all, it was just a tremendous effort by our entire staff — police, fire, road crew, EMS — just top-notch all around," Johnson said. "The whole Seneca team just came together to welcome all the Seneca visitors into town.

"It was just a party from Friday night all the way till Saturday night."

The festival returned downtown to Norton Thompson Park this year, and according to Johnson, broke some of its previous numbers.

As of Monday, Johnson didn't

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have a total count of visitors who had checked into the city's Hampton Inn for the weekend but said Seneca's Best Western was full for the festival.

The classic car show, which was one of several events that drew people into the park Friday afternoon, hosted more than 155 cars this year — "the biggest car show we've ever had," Johnson said.

And sometime after the show, participating barbecue cooks began filling the air with the smell of mouthwatering pulled pork and reportedly sold plates quickly.

"The barbecuers sold out of barbecue an hour earlier than normal, so the Education Foundation did good," Johnson said, alluding to proceeds that will benefit the Back-Pack Program of Oconee County.

But what seemed to impress Johnson most was the success of Seneca's first ever Glo in the Nite Run held at the Shaver Recreational Complex Friday night.

Proceeds from the run support the Seneca Recreation Department.

Officials expected a few hundred people and ended up with more than 300 registered, and 60 to 80 additional people showed up to run Friday.

Johnson said he ran out of glasses and shirts for those who hadn't registered, but told them they could tag along anyway.

"I said, 'You're welcome to come run,'" he said, "So we had around 450 to 500 runners and a lot of kids. Our race was just unbelievable."

A DJ pumped up the runners throughout the night, and they were treated to Dunkin' Donuts and Domino's pizza afterward. Participants ran through Adams subdivision, where there were 10 to 12 houses of people cheering everyone on.

Johnson said participants included children from Walhalla, Westminster and Seneca and runners from nearby states like North Carolina.

"It was a great gathering," he said. "It was just really a lot of fun. There was a race involved, but it was more about being a fun run."

The events coordinator took the run for himself and said the city will definitely host it again.

"I wanted to do the first one, and it was great," he said. "I wanted to experience what they were experiencing. Where else can you be a 10- to 12-year-old and run around town at night and then have Dunkin' Donuts when it's all over? You can't beat that."

Johnson said overall plenty of traffic came downtown, and he hopes the merchants and others were able to take advantage of the prospective business.

Domino's marketing manager Robbin Edwards, who helped coordinate the party for the Glo Run, said business has picked up for their Seneca location due to the festival and others like it.

Edwards manages several Upstate stores, including those in Walhalla, Westminster, Clemson and Seneca.

"In the Greenville area I've seen tremendous growth in the last six years," Edwards said last week. "Here, I've seen an extreme amount of the growth in the last year, and I'm a part of that growth because I purchased my home in Seneca. So it's a lot of growth and it's helping the community."

Before the festival officially kicked off Friday, councilman Ronnie O'Kelley told The Journal the nine-year-old festival has improved each year.

"There's a lot going on in this little town — I'm excited for it," O'Kelley said. "It just seems like every year we get a little better. You think we've hit it, then all of sudden you do something and it gets a little better."

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