



Conservation Theory band plays at the 36th annual Spittoon festival in Central.

PHOTOS BY KEN RUINARD/INDEPENDENT MAIL

LAST CALL, Y'ALL

Annual Spittoon celebration is set to end after this year

JAKE GROVE

JAKE.GROVE@INDEPENDENTMAIL.COM

Spittoon started out just the way you would have thought. A bunch of guys, self-proclaimed "rednecks," sitting around a bar talking about putting together a "big ol' party." The party would have beer, food, games and plenty of music to keep everyone entertained.

Oh, and did they mention beer?

Started all the way back in 1981, The Redneck Performing Arts Association was founded over a few (if not several) beers at the Esso Club in Clemson. At the time, the Esso was in need of some help raising money to buy beer for the upcoming football season. It was with that need and in that moment that Spittoon was born and it remains a tradition after 37 years.

It's a tradition, however, that comes to an end Aug. 26 when the final "last call" is announced and the RPAA breaks down the event for a final time.

"It's a bittersweet decision, for sure," said Justin Rakey, board member with the RPAA. "It was a long process coming to this conclusion but one that we think is right for the event as well as the organizers."

In the beginning, Spittoon was a spoof off Charleston's famed Spoleto festival. But this event would celebrate the culture of the redneck in a variety of ways. That included spitting contests, eating contests and, of course, cheap, canned beer.

It started at the Esso Club and moved to the Clemson Armory years later when it got too crowded for the



A crowd listens to the music from About a Girl from the cold beer tent at a past Spittoon Festival.

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Spittoono

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space there. After years at the Armory and thousands of people coming through, Spittoono was forced to move when the Armory underwent renovation. Today, the party continues from an open field located at 1569 Eighteen Mile Highway in Central. At least until the three-day event ceases after the Aug. 24-26 run.

"Unfortunately, it's about money," Rakey said. "Between the bad weather the last two years and the increased costs of beer, licenses, insurance and rentals, we can't raise as much money as we need to keep it going."

Rakey said the RPAA board toyed with the idea of taking a year or two off and bringing Spittoono back in a downsized way after some reflection, but felt that wasn't holding true to the event the founders started and built so many years before.

Founders like H.E.



Children play in a field at the 35th annual Spittoono Festival in Central.

FILE PHOTO

"Punk" Bodiford and Ted "Teddy" Balk were a part of the Spittoono organization effort from the beginning and only relinquished those roles in 2005 when Jeff Pekarek, president of the Redneck

Performing Arts Association, along with Jeremiah Hurley, vice-president, and Harry Nicholson, a board member, worked long and hard with friends to continue the proud tradition of Spittoono and the

RPAA.

Rakey came in around that time as well and laughed when asked how the founding members took the news that Spittoono would stop after the 2017 event.

"I'm trying to think of the exact words, but probably couldn't printed," Rakey said they were celebrating can say that. They how big it was and hard it had become understood exactly we were coming from

In years past, four members talked about the kind of coaster ride plan Spittoono was. It was a thing to plan a party Clemson students, whole other ball of when families grow people move on.

In the days leading to the event, Rakey self admitted that board talks about much they hate it. during the event, blast and they can't fine not putting the on every year.

For the final he Rakey said nothing change. There will bands that play throughout the three days, will be tons of food other vendors on site buy grub and wares, will be T-shirts for sale

to commemorate the final event and there will be lots of cold beer.

Plus, you can count on seeing familiar faces. Some will be attending for the first time, most will have been to multiple Spittoonos and a handful can say they have been to every one.

"Every year I see someone wearing a shirt from the very first Spittoono," Rakey said. "That really puts it all in perspective."

All funds after paying for the event will go to a variety of charities that the RPAA agree on. Those charities always benefit "kids and critters," said Rakey. This year, he said it will be fun not keeping any money in the account for future events and bringing the balance to zero.

In all, he hopes to bring in \$30,000 for the charities this year. And since it's the last one, Rakey expects the crowds to be bigger, the bands to be louder and everything to go off the way it always has.

Without a hitch.