

A great National Cherry Festival is a group effort

By **KIMBERLY WARREN**
Record-Eagle staff writer

For the 76th Annual National Cherry Festival, it really has taken a village, er, region.

Without the help of several different Michigan associations and organizations, Tom Kern said the Cherry Festival would never have been able to survive.

"There is no way the festival could go on without direct involvement from all these entities," said Kern, executive director of the National Cherry Festival. "It really is a cooperative partnership."

The festival joins together the City of Traverse City, Grand Traverse County, the Downtown Development Authority and the cherry industry — among others, Kern said.

"One of the things people coming to the festival don't realize is all the time and work and effort put in by all the officials," Kern said. "Also, how much is involved in planning the event."

"It takes a lot of coordination to make sure things get set up and make sure they go smooth," said Richard Lewis, city manager of Traverse City.

"Everybody works together to make sure it gets done."

Part of the job of the city of Traverse City is to meet with Festival officials and discuss any issues that they saw during the last year's festival or any that they foresee for this one.

"This has been going on for so long," Lewis said. "There are very little things that need to be changed."

They do have their share of little road blocks, he said: "Things always come up along the way. They always do. That's life."

Some of these road blocks really are road blocks—that's where Brian Crough steps in. Crough works with the Downtown Development Authority, and part of his festival duties is to make sure road construction doesn't get in the way for people to enjoy the Cherry Festival.

"Working with the city, we're making sure that all the construction projects are tied up," he said. "Either they're done or they're stopped for the week."

Some of the few projects Crough said he needs to get tied up are the Clinch Park Marina project and the streetscaping along State Street.

"We've got more projects than usual this year," he said. "But it looks like we'll get them all ready."

On the county end, Dennis Aloia said the most important thing they can do is provide help and services.

"A lot of our employees participate as volunteer staff," Aloia, county administrator, said. "We also get really involved with the recycling activities at the Cherry Festival, and our health department sponsors a family tent (at the Open Space)."

In all their work together, Kern said one of the biggest concerns of all these groups is the visitors of the festival.

"Security and safety of festivalgoers is of paramount concern to us," he said. "We work together to ensure we have the resources here to keep people safe."

Another of the important partnerships during the National Cherry Festival is the one between the cherry industry and the festival, said Phil Korson.


Korson is the president of the Cherry Marketing Institute.

One of the things that comes out of this relationship is advertisement for the cherry industry in activities sponsored by the Cherry Festival, Korson said.

"It's press that the industry can't afford to buy," he said. "It's only available to us through the Cherry Festival partnership."

Judy LaCross is the director of cherry promotions for the National Cherry Festival and said she also believes the relationship formed between the National Cherry Festival and the cherry industry is an important one.

"(Cherry growers) are one of the major sponsors of the Cherry Festival because of the relationship between CMI and the Festival," she said. "In the last ten years, the relationship has come a long way...the festival provides us with venues to promote (our cherries)."

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