

Arts and Crafts Fair 'union' of local art and cherry products

By LORI HALL STEELE

Special to the Record-Eagle

Cherries dancing in fine art, cherries adorning wind chimes, cherry soap, and cherries painted on glassware will be among the booths lining Union Street for the annual National Cherry Festival Arts and Crafts Fair. The event, now in its 10th year, draws 300 fine artists and craftsmen from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska. About 20 percent of artists are from northern Michigan.

"It is absolutely one of a handful of the largest one-day art fairs in the Midwest," said organizer Nancy Sundstrom, marketing director for the Downtown Development Authority. "This event is enormously popular with both vendors and attendees."

The fair is scheduled Sunday, July 7, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Union Street, from Grandview Parkway to Eighth Street. It coincides with the festival's annual air show, which this year features the Blue Angels, and draws hundreds of thousands downtown. "It has become one of those things people put on their calendar," Sundstrom said. "The demand had been so signifi-

cant that we've gradually expanded every year."

The popularity of the show has caused it to double in size since 1997, when it was a three-block event. Today, the show is six blocks long.

"The quality is very impressive, whether it's a hand-painted sign for the front of a cabin or an oil painting," Sundstrom said. "I think we're fortunate to have artists who take what they do very seriously. And I think the buyers are a discriminating bunch."

The event is a melange of art styles, from classic sculpture, fine photography and textile arts to yard art and wood-working.

This year, expect to see even more Native American art and culinary creations, from cherry vinegars to herb-flavored cooking oils. Handmade soaps, lotions and other body products are expected.

"Many of these things are made with products of the area and that seems to hold a special interest to people visiting who want to take home a flavor of the region," Sundstrom said. "People make a lot of things that are cherry themed, cloth tote bags to cherry-almond scented soap."

Traverse City furniture

maker Bob Mineweaser is among the fair's returning artisans. He's returning, in fact, to his usual booth, right along the Boardman River. Mineweaser, a retired science teacher, creates upscale Shaker-style furniture from premium hardwood, including cherry, walnut, birdseye maple and exotic woods like African wenge, a black wood, and padauk, a deep burgundy wood from South America. He only shows his work at local fairs.

"It's an extremely huge crowd, but it's nice," he said. "You get to meet the people, show off your work, you get positive strokes. It's also how I advertise."

A committee selects all artists who participate. Works must be handmade and original, not manufacture or imported. The committee also strives to ensure a diversity of mediums.

"There's just such a range of items," Sundstrom said. "It's hard to imagine what you'd be looking for that would not be there — handmade leather wallets, personalized stones for the backyard, a painted dresser for child, something to wear, sunglasses that have handmade jewelry."

"One of the things that always delights me is to look down the expanse of Union Street and see someone carry a bird bath or a big oil painting."

Wine Spectacular July 7

Believe it or not, the National Cherry Festival is not only about cherries. According to local wine maker Ed O'Keefe, Jr., the Festival is also a celebration of local agriculture, which include wine.

The specially made and bottled wine for the National Cherry Festival has been a part of the Festival since 1996. It is northern Michigan cherry wine married with Johannesburg Riesling, blended in a popular semi-dry style.

This wine is served with summertime cuisine at the annual Wine and Food Spectacular, sponsored by Chateau Grand Traverse and TRAVERSE, Northern Michigan's Magazine. The event will take place from 4 to 11 p.m. on Sunday, July 7 at the Festival Open Space near the entertainment stage.

"It's really a quality event," O'Keefe said. "And it seems to be growing in popularity every year."

While they dine, visitors can enjoy The Contours on the Pepsi-Kentucky Fried Chicken Bay Side Entertainment Stage.

"The biggest draw of the event is good wine and a good time in a low-key atmosphere," Kay Wertman, Festival wine tasting director, said.

For the first four years of the event, the Chateau used official Festival artwork on their labels. But often, that art work does not translate well into wine labels. Janet Wolff of Wolff Creative Group designed



what has become the annual Festival wine label.

"It's part of a complete commemorative package," O'Keefe said.

Chateau Grand Traverse produces more than 30 different types of nationally recognized wine. Among those are the Chateau's full assortment of cherry wines under the label "Traverse Bay Winery." Anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000 pounds of cherries are used each year in that production. Only 1,300 cases of Festival wine were produced this year. Bottles are available at the Festival and grocery stores and wine shops in the Grand Traverse Area. A \$12 admission fee includes the cost of a pin necessary for the Upper Deck, a commemorative wine glass, two wine tastes and one food taste.

Admission to the Festival Wine and Food Spectacular is restricted to those 21 and

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Food for all appetites at National Cherry Festival

Picky eater? No problem! The Cherry Festival has a variety of food, folks and fun.

For the whole week, vendors will offer an assortment of

local cuisine dishes at the Open Space's Food Oasis.

Mongolian BBQ, Arby's, J&S Hamburg, China Fair, Domino's Pizza, ITZA, Schelde's, Minerva's, Chianti's,

Amber Elk Ranch and Kentucky Fried Chicken will serve up finger-friendly foods, Grace Callahan, concessions director, commented.

She also said several festival vendors, such as Pepsi, Johnsonville bratwursts and Country Fresh ice cream will be on hand.

She said the prices will range from 50 cents for a bag of Jay's potato chips, to \$7 for a larger meal.

And the foods aren't the sit down style that the restaurants traditionally serve, she said.

"We are serving food that you can run with," she said. "Some of the booths have restaurants in town, but they won't have the same things that they have on their menus. For example, Minerva's will serve nachos, wings, and steak on a stick."

Callahan said the committee has chosen an assortment of vendors to provide variety.

"We wanted the Festival Food Court to be unique and provide a number of alternatives," she said.

The Festival Food Court is open from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m. the entire Cherry Festival week.

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