

Special Kids' Day celebrates 20th year

BY SARAH HENRY
Record-Eagle staff writer

The National Cherry Festival is one of a kind in many ways. Perhaps one of the most important distinctions is that it is the only festival in the United States to provide a special program to entertain mentally and physically disabled children, according to Cindy Hitesman, director of special kids' activities.

Special Kids' Day has been a fundamental part of the Cherry Festival since 1983. Since then, the program has grown by leaps and bounds. Only four children attended in 1983, but last year over 500 participated, some coming from as far as Texas, Florida and California.

"A lot of kids' families schedule their vacation around the Cherry Festival," Hitesman said.

Special Kids' Day is 9 a.m. to noon Wednesday, July 9 at the Open Space.

Children will be able to build their own cherry pies, participate in cherry pit spits, Oreo cookie stacking, bubble blows, basketball shoots and obstacle courses.

There will also be a wheelchair swing, face painting, kittens to pet from the Humane Society, rides on Traverse City's historic fire



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Special Kids' Day takes place from 9 a.m. until noon, Wednesday, July 9 at the Open Space.

truck and Laura, a friendly pet elephant.

"She's been coming for many years," Hitesman said of Laura. "Last year she celebrated her birthday on Special Kids' Day, so we made her cards."

At 10:30 a.m., the operation will move to Arnold Amusements midway park, where the children can enjoy free rides on a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, boats and more.

Hitesman said all the

amusement park workers donate their time to the children.

"It's really cool because they take the kids out of wheelchairs and lift them onto rides, whereas most people wouldn't be as patient," she said.

To pre-register a special needs child for Special Kids' Day, call 947-9283.

Special Kids' Day is sponsored by Tom's Food Markets, Prevo's Family Market and Oleson's Food Stores.

Fishing Pond lets children of all abilities have reel fun

BY MELANIE TACOMA
Record-Eagle staff writer

One of the magic moments of a childhood summer is the first time fishing - the first big catch. Each year at the National Cherry Festival, children get a chance to try their luck at the Fishing Pond in the Festival Open Space, sponsored by Fifth Third Bank, and Grand Traverse Tackle Box.

Roger Borgeson, who has supervised the fishing pond for five years, said he's always surprised how many kids catch their first fish there.

"I love fishing and you see a lot of kids who never get a chance to do it," he said. "It's amazing how many kids catch their first fish at the Cherry Festival."

This year, in addition to fishing all week at the pond, on Tuesday and Wednesday the Festival will be hosting the Casting Kids program to teach kids and improve their fishing techniques.

"We get a lot of questions every year and every year they're the same," Borgeson said. "I made a suggestion (to have Casting Kids come to the Festival) and the powers that be at the Cherry Festival said 'that sounds like a good idea.'"



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The Fishing Pond is open all Festival week, with July 8 & 9 offering the Casting Kids program, which will help children with their fishing skills.

who works with Casting Kids and the Bass Angler's Social Society, which sponsors the program, kids cast from 10, 20 and 30 feet at a target. All winners at the National Cherry Festival get a rod and reel, and a medallion, and have an opportunity to go to the state- and nation-wide competition, where they can win a scholarship.

"This is just the beginning,"

According to Bob Preston,

Preston said.