

The impact of the National Cherry Festival: \$26 million

BY GINA GOODMAN
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With its beaches and orchards, ever-growing numbers of restaurants and cafes, and its' small-town feel with urban-city culture, Traverse City doesn't seem to need help keeping area businesses thriving year-round.

Even so, the National Cherry Festival is a huge draw to the region and assists in spreading the

word about the many attractions of Northern Michigan.

"The Cherry Festival is much more than a one week event," said Robert Gattin, general manager at the Holiday Inn-West Bay. "It brings recognition to Traverse City, and it's a positive influence on the area."

This year, with Fourth of July weekend, the return of the Blue Angels, and new events like the Canoe races and Dock Dogs competition,

the Festival is expected to be the one of the largest yet.

"Bookings are way ahead of normal," Gattin said of the hotel. "Especially this year. With the Blue Angels and the Fourth of July, it generates an awful lot of interest. It will be quite a weekend."

Cherry Festival President George Wertman said this will be a big year for the festival, although it is diffi-

cult to predict how large.

"It's hard to determine the amount of people who come and go," said Cherry Festival President George Wertman. "I'd guess there will be anywhere from 500,000 to 700,000."

The almost one million people who come to the Festival help support local businesses, especially those located in the heart of downtown.

Bill Golden, Vice President of Golden Shoes on Front Street, said about 50 percent of his sales for that week is a result of the Cherry Festival, with business for the whole year from tourism coming to around 20 percent.

"It doesn't mean they're going to buy something that week, but those people also come back to Traverse City, when it's not so busy," he said. "And I hear that a lot, they want to come back in October when it's a little slower. They remember being here, so that really helps."

According to information taken from last year, the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA), estimated the economic impact from the Cherry Festival on the community to be over \$26 million. Over 75 percent of dollars spent during that week remain in the area.

Aside from the Festival itself, the benefits of the cherry industry are a large factor in the economic impact of the Grand Traverse area as well. From wines to beauty products, and more recently, pain relievers, it seems that cherry farmers are needed more and more.

Carla Evans, the Nutritional Marketing Consultant for Flavanioid Sciences, said that the newly-researched health benefits of cherries are will help the Traverse City area.

"It's going to benefit the entire industry," she said. "Because now you have a whole huge other market that the cherry farmers to be able to sell their whole fruit to, so subsequently we won't be losing our beautiful land. Now we need that land."

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