

ONE FOR ALL, AND ALL FOR ONE

Celebrating 33 years of goodwill at the Astoria-Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival

Story by LYNETTE RAE McADAMS

It's not often that you get to indulge, guilt free, in the pleasures of excess food and drink, but at the Astoria-Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival, not only is it encouraged — you might even consider it your civic duty. Whether you're coming from near or far, participating in your first festival or one of many in a long-standing tradition, know that most of the dollars you'll spend during this annual three-day event get funneled directly back into the local community — a lot of it right before your very eyes.

"I think that's one of the greatest things about Crab Fest," says Gary Friedman, who manages the Clatsop County Fairgrounds, where the event is held. "I've always admired the fact that there's such a wide range of organizations helping run the festival, and also making money at it."

According to Kelsey Balensifer, events coordinator for the Astoria-Warrenton Chamber of Commerce, that's been part of the plan since the beginning. "It's always been important to us that this event benefit not only businesses and chamber members, but the community as a whole," she says. To that end, the chamber, which has been hosting the event since 1982, hires as many local nonprofit organizations as it can to cover the enormous amount of behind-the-scenes work that's required to keep the very popular festival running smoothly.

"There's a massive amount of community support and involvement behind it," Balensifer says, rattling off a mile-long list of unsung heroes: "The Astoria Band Boosters unload the buses for us; the Boy Scout parents handle vendor parking; we've got Kiwanis on trash duty again this year, picking up during festival hours; and the Key Club (a branch of Kiwanis for high schoolers) handles clean up each night after closing. The Columbia Pacific Assistance League is operating our wine-check service, where attendees can check the wines they purchase instead of carrying them around all day, and you can't forget groups like the Roller Dolls (the North Oregon Coast's women's roller derby team), who very willingly sort the vendor recycling, or our local bank volunteers, who handle the busy admissions table so expertly.

'It takes more than 150 volunteers coming from across the community to run this event, and 33 years later, here we all are, doing it again. I think that's incredible.'

"It's definitely an event that only happens because the community chips in so much," she adds. "Everyone gets excited about it, and for a lot of these groups, it's a major fundraiser." "Actually, it's our only fundraiser," says a chuckling Bill Landwehr, coordinator ("by default") for the Astoria Clowns, a local group of ambassadors who run amok all over the Northwest in promotion of their fair city. "I don't want to brag," he continues in a hushed tone, "but I think we might have the most popular booth there. It's our only fundraiser because it's the only one we need."

No, the clowns aren't hired as part of the week-

end's entertainment; for these three days they abandon their costumes and balloon tricks and start swinging spatulas instead, peddling their famous Clown Bread to the attending masses who eagerly line up for it. "You can pick out the people who've never been to the festival before," Landwehr says. "They look at our sign like, 'what could I possibly want from a clown booth?' That's when we lure them in with samples."

For those not in the know, Clown Bread consists of a slice of freshly baked French bread smothered in the clown's own super secret sauce, then topped with your choice of either crab or shrimp, and broiled to perfection. "And yes," Landwehr says, "it is THAT good." (Don't think you can trust a clown? Judge instead by the winding line that will be out the



33rd annual Crab, Seafood & Wine Fest

April 24, 25 & 26

Hours/Admission

Friday, 4 to 9 p.m. (\$10/adult; \$5/child)

Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. (\$10/adult; \$5/child)

Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (\$5/adult; kids & active military FREE)

Location

Clatsop County Fairgrounds • 92937 Walluski Loop, Astoria

Parking: \$15/car; space is limited

Shuttles

\$3/person, round trip (exact fare, cash only). Park and ride locations at the Port of Astoria, several lodging properties, and some campgrounds.

Expect delays during peak festival hours. Service is limited on Sunday.

For complete shuttle bus and live music schedules, or for more information, visit oldoregon.com or call 800-875-6807.



Photo by Alex Pajunas

Dave Goldie, middle, of Astoria, and Joe Seganos, of Longview, Wash., keep things moving on the legendary crab and shrimp melt assembly line at the Astoria Clowns booth inside the food tent at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds during last year's Crab Fest.



Photo by Alex Pajunas

The sound of a shattered wine glass, accidentally dropped by Dave Crosby, right, of Spokane, Wash., provides cause for celebration at last year's Astoria-Warrenton Crab, Seafood and Wine Festival. The oft-repeated occurrence is regularly met by applause and cheers from festival attendees and results in prompt clean-up by people like Daniel Emlet, left, who calmly moves in with a broom and dust pan.



2015 Wine Competition

Each year, all participating festival wine vendors are invited to put their best bottles forward for the annual Crab Fest Wine Competition. Judged during a blind tasting by industry professionals — winemakers, wine writers, wine buyers and restaurant sommeliers — here are this year's winners:

Best of Show RED:

Girardet Baco Noir 2013

Best of Show WHITE:

Abiqua Wind Vineyard Early Muscat 201

People's Choice Award:

J. Scott Cellars Pinot Blanc 2013

door all day.)

While the festival is lots of work, it's also worth it, according to clowns like Landwehr. "It'll take 10 or 12 of us guys to work it on Saturday — that's the big day—but it's lots of fun and for a good cause, so we enjoy it every year." The money raised from sales pays for the Clown's year-round participation in parades, funds four Clatsop Community College scholarships, covers an annual donation to the Boy Scouts, and helps stock food baskets in December.

The Clowns won't be the only ones working hard all weekend to drum up cash for worthwhile causes. The Astoria Rotary Club — a charter Crab Fest vendor — will once again be offering half and full Dungeness crab dinners, replete with bread and homemade coleslaw, for what always seems like a bargain. "We get our crab locally from Bornstein Seafoods," says Mitch Mitchum, the club's community service chair, "and this year we'll start off with 800 pounds and buy more over the weekend if we need it. The price of crab is up by about 35 percent over last year, so that makes it challenging, but we'll still try to offer the best deal we can. We're also hoping to have Whiskey Crab Soup again this year — an old Bornstein family recipe, which will be great. It always sells out."

Like the Astoria Clowns, Mitchum says the funds raised will secure the club's scholarship program, as well as support a few other charitable events throughout the year. About the festival, he adds, "It takes about 40 Rotarians to pull it off, and we'll be happy to be there again this year. It's good exposure, it's service based, it's fun, and you get to see a lot of friends. After all these years, it feels like home."

That's not news to Balensifer, who says she hears similar sentiments throughout the community. "I think most people consider the festival a very authentic celebration, a time during the off season...when we can really welcome visitors and showcase the amazing bounty of our own region and the entire Northwest."

Returning this year are some repeat festival fa-

vorites, like inexpensive park-and-ride shuttle services throughout the greater Astoria area, live music all three days on two different stages, and of course, almost 200 vendor booths — featuring more than 60 different Oregon wineries, a handful of local breweries, one distillery (a first-time event), over a hundred fine arts and craft vendors, and obviously, an ocean's worth of seafood.

"It takes more than 150 volunteers coming from across the community to run this event," says Balensifer, "and 33 years later, here we all are, doing it again. I think that's incredible."

Asked what she was most looking forward to at this year's Crab Fest, Balensifer was quick to answer, illustrating nicely the heart of service that permeates the whole event: "For me, it's the little moments when you get to help someone have a really great experience — that's ultimately what I love about my job. That, and just getting to share this wonderful location."



Submitted photo

Carrie Cunningham will perform songs of imagery and emotion from 3:15 to 5 p.m. Saturday on the Exhibit Hall Stage.



Photo by Alex Pajunas

Ryan Stembridge, the tasting room manager at TeSoAria Vineyard and Winery in Roseburg, sells one of their 13 different bottles of wine during last year's crab festival.



Submitted photo

Bill Landwehr, also known as Stubby the clown, coordinates the Astoria Clowns to appear in regional parades and festivals. The clowns will appear sans costumes and serve their famous Clown Bread at the Crab, Seafood and Wine Festival, their only fundraiser.