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BMD from A1

its location from Coiner Park to the downtown historic district.

Saturday morning kicked off with the Grand Miners Parade, featuring a total of 37 entries, returning familiar businesses and organizations to the annual march down 10th and Main streets.

At noon, the main stage kicked off the weekend with the Calvary Creek band's arrangements of nostalgic pop songs as vendors unfurled their tents throughout the downtown area.

Crowds gradually filled the streets and maintained a constant flow of shoppers, diners and game participants through the historic district.

Food vendors were notably absent from this year's event as BMD organizers wanted to direct dollars toward local businesses who had suffered through a year of restrictive public health measures. The plan worked as restaurant seats were filled and downtown's new streateries were put to use.

Saturday attractions included musical performances from Buck and Elizabeth, Annie Mae Rhodes Band, 2016 Band and Men from S.U.R.F. as well as a magic show from Jay the Magician.

Opal Center for Arts and Education showed historical films, American Legion hosted bingo and both the Kiddie and Bloomers Parade made their return with marches down the center of downtown.

The evening culminated with the introduction of BMD's newest competition - ore cart races, an event which drew packed crowds lining the sidewalks as eight teams raced



PHOTO BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Uncle Sam waved and called out to the crowd, paying respects to a float of Veterans of Foreign Wars drummers tailing him in the Grand Miners Parade on July 17.

homemade ore carts up and down Main Street.

Sunday saw many of same events and performers as well as the final ore cart racing teams determine the competition's victors. An awards ceremony wrapped up the festival that evening.

A virtual feud between Slabtown and Lemati was introduced as well as businesses participated in a fundraising strategy, allowing patrons to purchase food and drink items to fill up "passports" and support their chosen "gang."

A portion of the proceeds will go toward next year's festival.

The packed weekend of events seemed to run smoothly and many felt that pulling off any version of the festival at all was a feat in itself.

Williams acknowledged it was a challenging year, but noted that he was no stranger to the struggle.

"When I when I took over 1979, we started with \$82 in the bank," he said.

Williams recalled that the year before, the organization had to deal with the problem of fights in the beer garden and needed to dialogue with law enforcement over jurisdictional authority. Still, they found a solution.

"But this year, the challenge was we can't even plan because we don't know what we can do because of the governor's mandates," he said.

There was also the uncertainty of insurance as the organization wrestled to close a deal as the festival's date drew closer.

The loss of the carnival again this year added more to the financial strain. The amusement company backed out again because of a lack of staffing, meaning that the four or five thousand dollars it brings in each year could no longer be counted into the BMD organization's roughly \$20,000 budget.

The budget, too, was pared down from its usual \$58,000 or so for Coiner Park events. Moving the festival downtown helped cut costs, but ends were still hard to meet.

Williams credited the long list of sponsors with helping keep the festival afloat, not just this year, but through last year's cancellation as well.

"But as luck would have it, we had the pandemic play itself out to an extent, right at the last minute. And we had excellent weather," he said.

The lack of revenue also made getting commitment from performers to fill the main stage a sticky situation.

KNND owner Cameron Reiten, who served as the festival's entertainment committee coordinator, had to make a tough pitch to prospective musicians: play for free.

To his relief, Reiten found the responses to be overwhelmingly positive as performers made their commitments and filled time slots.

"It was really quite extraordinary," he said. "I approached them with some trepidation because of what they've gone through in the last 15 months or so. ... Everybody was just so gracious about it."

Performers volunteered to get on stage for next to nothing, with some performing both days.

"They all were paid in food and tips," said Reiten, adding that he was deeply thankful for all the sacrifices everyone made in keeping the festival going.

He noted a special thanks to Erin and Silvia Kitterman for donating food to the hospitality tent for performers.

To top off the stressful last few weeks leading up to the event, controversy surrounded the Grand Miners Parade just about a week before the festival when news of a potential application of entry from a Proud Boys member elicited condemnation from community members, with some sponsors threatening to sever ties with the organization.

The issue threatened to unravel fundamental partnerships which keep the operation going.

In the end, the Proud Boys member stated he would not apply to be in the parade, however, thus averting a potentially contentious weekend.

Despite the uncertainty, financial difficulty and a brief brush with controversy, though, festival organizers have been clear that they consider the event a success.

If the bustling streets and the early shutdown of some downtown restaurants due to selling out are any indication, the festival found popularity among the community as well.

"I think it was excellent. It went better than what I anticipated," said Williams. "I was very, very happy with the turnout for the ore cart races, too."

Next year, Williams is hoping to see a grand comeback to Coiner Park with more parade entrants.

The ore cart races, too, are due to make a return, though the details of the race location still have to be worked out.

Williams added that he hopes to see more volunteers join the team to help produce another successful festival in 2022.

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