

First Versailles FareFest a Big Success
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Yes, we were scared. It was about ten days before the very first Versailles FareFest was to take place at Fountain Square in our beautiful downtown area. The Versailles High School Alumni Association, which was sponsoring this festival, had committed thousands of hours of planning (and no small amount of cash) to block off West Main Street, recruit dozens of vendors and fine restaurants from all over the northern Miami Valley, and arrange for all the tents and portapotties, etc. required to stage such an event. Any profits were already promised to go to the Versailles Community Scholarship Fund. At that point, we had sold a grand total of forty-seven tickets!

An early-morning Sweet Shop meeting found about a dozen ashen-faced members of the Board of Directors going over this bad news and wracking their collective brains to come up with a way to overcome such adversity. It had all seemed like such a great idea a few months ago! Well, Tigers do not quit very easily. Time to buckle down and make it happen.

Some extra effort on publicity the following week probably helped, but what really saved the day was the propensity of our local citizenry to wait until the last minute to commit to an activity they were probably going to do anyway. Ticket sales, which had begun as a trickle, started to pick up a bit until they became a steady flow, and finally a virtual deluge. In all, nearly 700 paid admissions were sold. It just took a little while (and a big break on the weather) for FareFesters to commit.

The vendors, including about a dozen fine restaurants and an even larger assortment of beer and wine distributors, began arriving around noon, and everything was ready to go before the 2:00 starting time. Guests started strolling through the colorful tents and sampling the wares within. No one seemed to be in any kind of hurry. The food was absolutely scrumptious! It would be unfair to single out any particular chef or restaurant. It was all that good.

Higgins-Madewell were set up on the gazebo by the fountain, and their wonderful music could be heard all throughout the confines of the festival. Many attendees took their complimentary wine glasses, which were continually refilled with favored fine wines and tasty brews, to the picnic tables or bistro stands on the square and simply chilled with friends. Others preferred to remain in the tents--going from one vendor's table to the next, asking questions and getting a taste or two of something special before moving on. There was no hurry. Three hours may not sound like a very long time to visit so many spots, but there was never any sense of urgency.

Of course, it did not hurt that the weatherman was on our side. Mother Nature was certainly giving her all this late summer afternoon. Fluffy white puffs of clouds eased across an azure sky, with temperatures in the mid-seventies. Absolutely perfect! Such had not been the case the previous evening, as the first Return to the Den under those same tents had been subjected to a steady rain and chilly temperatures. However, this is Versailles, and its residents know all about camping out under a big tent and enjoying a few adult beverages while reviewing a big football victory and listening to the great sounds of a talented local rock band, Empty Tank. The crowd Friday night was also a bit late arriving due to a thirty-minute lightning delay in starting the football game just down the street. Never fear, next year it will be bigger and better.

Back to the FareFest on Saturday afternoon, people came from all over to sample all the great fare. Quite a few license plates from Indiana could be seen alongside those of the locals. Yes, there are wine-lovers in V-town--plenty of them. But it was not just those oenophiles that paid to get in. Confirmed beer drinkers and tee-totalers alike lined up right alongside those experienced winefest-goers. Just wanting to try something different was the rule of the day. And try it, they did.

After the final door prizes had been distributed around 5:00 and most of the vendors had packed up to leave, dozens of guests and a few very happy vendors hung around and finished their final glasses while comparing notes about what had been the best things about the day. Our other local establishments were certainly not negatively affected by the FareFest. Quite a few thirty-and-forty-somethings eventually headed eastward down Main Street to several local eateries, some of which had

live music scheduled for the evening. So many FareFesters packed one establishment that people needed to sit outside on the curb and sidewalk while listening to the music.

It was definitely a party atmosphere, but it was not just another Poultry Days. When asked how things had gone for them that afternoon, a couple of security personnel said it had been like a day in the park. "Think Poultry Days without all the fights and rowdiness," gratefully sighed one uniformed deputy. Cool!

True, it had been scary for a while, but it was worth all the sweat. Comments from guests and vendors alike convinced those who were in charge that this would not be the last FareFest in Versailles--or the final Return to the Den for that matter. Plans are already being formulated to do it all over again next year and the next year and the next year.... If you missed it this year, mark your calendars for the weekend of the first home football game in 2010. We'll be back!

The Alumni Association's Board of Directors would like to thank everyone who helped make our first FareFest such a success. It would be impossible to name them all here, but mention must be made of all the Inn at Versailles employees, the Village workers, and the superb vendors. All of that fabulous fare was donated. Admission fees, for the most part, were used to pay for other items, such as tents, wine glasses, the entertainment, etc. Just about every vendor already plans to come back next year. They appreciated how well the event was planned and how wonderful the guests were to deal with. Here's betting that next year will be even bigger. Better? Maybe, but it will have to go some to beat 2009!

