

Bullshooting Contest Features Tall Tales On The Lighter Side

The bull is sure to fly this weekend when storytellers from near and far take the stage at the annual Brunswick County Veterans' Bullshooting Contest.

Billed as "North Carolina's Greatest Bullshooting Contest," the competition will be held Saturday around 3 p.m. as part of the N.C. Oyster Festival at Seaside.

Jess Parker, Brunswick County Veterans' Services Officer and founder of the annual tall tale contest, says all successful bullshooters have two things in common.

"A knowledge of many things and a great imagination are very important," he said. "The art of bullshooting is to see how outrageous you can get with a story."

Parker said some contestants tell a better tale if they dress for the occasion or use props such as a shotgun or hunting rifle. "It depends entirely on the contestant," he said. "Some people are effective with props. But I don't use them very well, personally."

Wearing a fringed shirt and cowboy hat, Bob Johnston of Matthews won last year's contest with a tall tale about "Sam—the best mule West Texas ever produced." David Grimes of Hope Mills took second place, and 1987 champ Warren Sing of Cramerton captured third.

Both Johnston and Sing should be on a long list of quality competitors at this year's contest, said Parker, noting that he has asked all past winners to return.

"I don't know if they'll all compete or not, but I'm asking them all to be there," he said. "We're getting almost to the point where we could have a past champions' contest."

Parker also said some members of the National Liars Club may enter this year's tall-tale contest. He said a member of the group stationed in Omaha, Neb., contacted him in early September about chartering a bus to the festival.

The National Liars Club specializes in one-liners, said Parker, while contestants in the bullshooting contest are encouraged to relate longer tales.

"I'm sure some of them could join right in with us and some of us could join right in with them," said Parker. "Of course, we are very adamant that we don't lie."

Parker, who entered the contest for the first time last year, noted that he probably won't enter this year unless there aren't enough bullshooters. He said he felt uneasy as a competitor in last year's event because he has run the contest since it started six years ago.

"The comfort level was not what I like," he said. "I'm just too close to the contest to compete."

Although he probably won't be among those shooting the bull this year, Parker said he expects Brunswick County to be well represented in the contest. Two other area residents entered the bullshooting competition in 1988, and Parker said

there seems to be more local interest this year.

As always, Parker said he expects many tall tales about animals and fish. "The old standbys will be here," he said. "But I'm always surprised with the ones some of them come up with."

For the second consecutive year, the Coast Toasters Toastmasters Club will judge the contest. Contestants will be judged on the same criteria as last year, said Parker, with ratings based on content, general interest, originality and use of exaggeration to create a story that is "almost believable". Judges will also consider each bullshooter's use of body language, vocal expression and appropriate language.

Parker said the bullshooting contest started out as a way for veterans of the county to "get together and shoot the breeze." Over the years, he said it evolved into a light-hearted contest that typically attracts large crowds who enjoy getting caught up in the exciting stories.

The contest is sponsored by WAAV AM radio station of Wilmington. Trophies sponsored by TJ's Auto Electric of Shallotte will be awarded to the champion bullshooter as well as to the second- and third-place finishers.

There's no entry fee. Persons who want to enter can sign up at the festival information table on the day of the contest or contact Parker in advance at 253-4307.

Chowder Pot Simmers Again

There will new faces behind the chowder pot at the North Carolina Oyster Festival this year.

In recent years Brunswick Community College has sponsored the chowder pot, with proceeds helping to finance student scholarships.

Tending the chowder this weekend will be members of the West Brunswick High School Chorus. Each steaming bowl of chowder, thick with chunks of potato and clams, will be served with a choice of crackers or hushpuppies.

The cost will be \$3 per bowl, with chowder available during regular food service hours at the festival.

Chorus Director Cheri Skaggs said proceeds will be divided between the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce and the chorus. The chorus will set aside its share to help cover the cost of competing in a choral festival next spring.

Last year the chorus won a first place in a national competition in New York City.



BEACON FILE PHOTO
BOB JOHNSTON of Matthews won the 1988 Bullshooting contest with a tall tale about a mule named Sam. He should be among the competitors at this year's event.

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