

Good Weather, Friday Schedule Aid Festival Success, Profits

BY SUSAN USHER

Good weather, good food, a new schedule and plenty of entertainment put smiles on faces of visitors and sponsors at the 11th annual North Carolina Oyster Festival Friday and Saturday at Seaside.

Ridge Ward and Rachel of Nakina were among the first-timers at the festival Saturday. They came for their first oysters of the season. Ward was quick to say that the event had been "real good so far."

As he worked to open his peck of roasted oysters, Ward quipped that he would be the slowest contestant of all if he were to enter the state shucking contest later that afternoon. He didn't.

The Nakina couple weren't the only ones enjoying the festival.

"You couldn't have had two nicer days," said artisan John Bigelow of Hickory. "Now, if the Braves can only win their game tonight."

Based on gate receipts (\$1 for adults, with children age 12 and under admitted free), an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 visitors attended the celebration at Seaside, about the same as last year. Allan Dameron, festival chairman, said Monday.

Dameron, who was finishing up a second stint as festival chairman, said the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, festival sponsor, was pleased with the turnout for the event and its smooth operation. A blown transformer Friday night shut down the Band of Oz and some booths about 10 to 15 minutes early, but the problem was fixed by Saturday.

Future festivals will be held on Friday and Saturday, judging from the success of this year's event. "I think we've found our format," he said.

Friday afternoon and evening drew a mix of retirees, other local residents and vacationers, some of whom were due to return home Saturday and were disappointed to find roasted oysters weren't on the menu. Instead they had a choice of raw oyster cocktails, shrimp cocktails and clam chowder.

"It's a good crowd," Annette Odum, president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, said Friday. "It already



THE TOP OF THE FERRIS WHEEL yields a bird's eye view of the festival.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

beats Sundays."

It helped, she said, that local schools were out for the day.

Crowds were in the mood to not only shop, but buy. Food vendors and arts and crafts exhibitors enjoyed good patronage.

Local artist Virginia "Bunny" Lauzon hadn't exhibited at an event such as the Oyster Festival in years until this past weekend, but is among those already signed up to return next year.

"I renewed acquaintances with a lot of people and had a lot of fun," she said. "It was great. I sold a lot of framed prints."

Another local artist, Bryan Varnam, also said he was pleased with response to his work.

It was a good weekend also for the chamber, which during the festival's early years realized no profit. The festival committee cleared \$20,000 this year after expenses that also totaled about \$20,000, Dameron said, from sources such as gate receipts, soft drink and shirt sales.

"We're real happy," he said. The Brunswick County Shrine Club, purveyors of seafood for the two-day event, were smiling as well by the end of the day Saturday. "If they'll have us, we'll be back," said Shriner Albert Parker, whose original clam chowder sold so well Friday he had to make more for Saturday's crowd.

Glenn Humbert, a co-chairman for the project, said results exceeded the group's expectations. Members dished up 1,450 servings of various types of seafood, including 345 peck-size buckets of mostly Gulf oysters.

"This year was a learning experience for us," he said. "The club hasn't discussed it yet, but everybody who was working was already talking about what we could do next year to improve things."

Chief of the changes in mind: offering roasted oysters Friday as well as Saturday.

Several changes are also in line for next year's arts and crafts show, which Chairman Jack Scarborough will be turning over to Sally Nord, his assistant for the past two years. Scarborough said that the quality

and quantity of entries in the overall show and in the juried show has improved over the years. As a result, more juried show categories will be offered next year than simply arts or crafts, he said.

This year the booth area was sold out, with 112 exhibitors and vendors, and Scarborough said he expects the area to be expanded next year. Sponsors of purchase awards for the juried show were Jean and Fred Mintz Jr. of Coastal Drugs, and the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce. Most of the purchase awards will be displayed either at the chamber office or at the new Southeastern Welcome Center on the U.S. 17 bypass.

Steve Clobridge of Beaufort,

N.C. won best of show this year with a multi-dimensional scene of a quaint fisherman and his catch.

Judges Jean Mintz, Jimmy Register and Penny Redwine awarded first place in art to Nancy Armour of Chincoteague, Va., for her painting of a door, while Frank Hewett won second place with a pointillism print in black and white.

In crafts, first place went to silver artisan John Bigelow for a silver necklace with a Southwest flavor entitled, "Apache Homeland". Second place went to Gene Coble, a woodworker, for an inland bench.

Next year's festival will be back at the Sea Trail Plantation grounds at Seaside, with Oct. 17 and 18 as the tentative dates.



MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FOLK ART by Steve Clobridge draws an appreciative crowd, with one piece winning best of show honors in juried competition.



RACHEL REGISTER and Ridge Ward of Nakina enjoy their first oysters of the 1991 season and their first Oyster Festival.



GENE WARD, Howard Stocks and Al Parker Jr. empty a steaming tray of oysters fresh from the cooker.



JUDGES (clockwise from left) John Williams, Terry Barbee, Eddie Sweatt, Alan Holden and Rep. David Redwine inspect completed trays in the N.C. Oyster Shucking Contest.