

Fredonia pulls plug on celebration

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Shortage of volunteers blamed for demise of annual community event

Village of Fredonia officials last week agreed to pull the plug on Celebrate Fredonia, the community event which brought neighbors together for more than a decade.

Trustee Mark Edbauer Sr., who served as the chairman of Celebrate Fredonia Committee last year, reported the demise of the celebration during last week's Village Board meeting.

Edbauer said it has become increasingly difficult to find volunteers willing to put in the time needed to make the event a success. Only four members of last year's committee are willing to continue.

"There is just too much work for the people who have volunteered their time to make this work," Edbauer said.

"We've asked for help, but the residents in the village don't seem interested in stepping up."

The event appears to have run its course, he said.

"We had 12 good years. That is a good, long run," Edbauer said.

Celebrate Fredonia had been touted as a celebration of small-town life, featuring a community parade down Fredonia Avenue, followed by music, games and food in Firemen's Park.

Although organizers said the festival was on unstable footing in the past, Edbauer said now is the time to put the celebration to rest.

"I think we are better off just ending it as it is, rather than leaving everything to two or three people and have it become a joke. I am not willing to see Celebrate Fredonia become a joke," he said.

Village officials often seemed uncertain how to approach the event. At one time it had been under the direction of the Parks Committee, but more recently was governed by an independent committee with membership drawn from community groups that shared the proceeds.

Last year, those groups included the Ozaukee High School boys' basketball team, Boy Scout Troop 877 and the Holy Cross 4-H Club. Officials said the groups each earned about \$1,200 for working at the event, but the village estimates that the celebration had a net loss of about \$600.

Edbauer said it has been difficult to get other groups to help with the event, because it has never been a big money maker.

"In the past, groups were hesitant to let other get involved because they didn't want to share the profits," he said.

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“In order for Celebrate to succeed, people need to see it as a community event not as a way to line their pockets. As far as I can see, that is not going to happen.”

Trustee Fritz Buchholtz, who oversaw the celebration when it was under the control of the Parks Committee, shared Edbauer’s frustration.

“This has always been seen as a community event, not as a way to make money for groups,” Buchholtz said.

He said organizing the event requires months and months of planning, not just showing up on the day of the parade.

Trustee Don Dohrwardt said officials have often felt conflicted about what the village’s role should be in organizing the event.

“Putting on celebrations is way beyond what the people hired us to do,” Dohrwardt said.

Village President Chuck Lapicola said the demise of the event is not something to celebrate.

“It saddens me, but I could see it coming. It seemed like the amount of volunteers was down in recent year,” Lapicola said.

“People continued to attend, but no one wanted to put in the work. I am very disappointed.”

As an alternative, he suggested the event could be held on a less-regular basis, perhaps every other year or every three years.

Last fall, Lapicola attempted to pump some new enthusiasm for the celebration by suggesting it adopt a new theme, possibly a tribute to the community’s farming roots.

Despite that call for community input, no one came forward to help plan to revamp the event.

“It may not be doomed yet,” Lapicola said optimistically.

While that may be the case, Edbauer said it is probably too late in the year to organize an event for this fall.

“As of now, it is shelved. If someone wants to take it over, it would have to be for next year,” he said.