

Remnants of Pirate Fest head to the auction block

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 24 July 2013 18:26

Merchandise, website will be sold to help pay bills from cancelled event

The remnants of Port Washington Pirate Festival, everything from the name itself to the festival website and merchandise, will be put on the auction block soon, with the proceeds going to pay off the festival's debt, founder Kim McCulloch said.

"We want to make sure the opportunity's out there for someone else — the city, businesses, the blues group — to carry on what we started," McCulloch said. "If the parks department wants it, great. If the business owners want it, great. If civic groups want it, great."

"As long as the city's happy with them and wants to work with them, great. They (the city) obviously don't want to work with us."

No one on Pirate Festival's organizing committee is interested in bidding on the items, she said, although the members would work with the winning bidder to walk them through the process initially.

"It would be a shame for this not to continue," she said. "It's pretty much a turnkey operation. We don't have to be a part of it."

McCulloch said that Pirate Festival was started to help downtown businesses, a goal it had achieved.

"It did a great job at that," McCulloch said. "We made sure everyone went down to the businesses."

Pirate Festival, a popular event that kicked off the summer festival season in downtown Port Washington for eight years, was cancelled in April.

Tensions between the city and the organizers had gotten so bad by that point that the Common Council approved plans for another event, Port Harbor Family Festival, to be held during the first week of June, when Pirate Fest was traditionally held.

McCulloch said that the impact of cancelling Pirate Fest was significant.

"The City of Port Washington needs Port Washington Pirate Festival, and the businesses do too," she said.

Although plagued by poor weather most years, Pirate Festival drew crowds of as many as 30,000 people to the city each year.

But city officials said they were concerned about items that included a lack of security and

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clean-up, and said they wanted to see a more structured approach to the festival's planning. The city asked for a variety of information, including a list of organizers, permit and license applications, certificate of insurance, a security contract and ground plans.

That didn't happen, officials said, adding the final straw came when a number of vendors from last year's festival contacted them because they hadn't been paid.

McCulloch said she had been poorly treated by the city and because of that members of her organizing committee didn't want their contact information given to officials. The city had also threatened to turn the festival over to others to run, she said, making her reluctant to turn over much of the information the city sought.

McCulloch said she is still working out the details of the auction, which she hopes to have completed by the end of September.

Proceeds will go to help pay off the festival's bills, she said, although she declined to say how much they total.