

NEWS RELEASE



DATE: Please Embargo until Mon. Oct. 14, 2019

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Petoskey's Festival on the Bay to Dissolve

The sun has set on Petoskey's Festival on the Bay. The Petoskey Chamber's Board of Directors voted recently to dissolve the festival after 17 years due to financial concerns.

The festival was hosted by the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce since it was formed in 2003. Carlin Smith, the organization's president, said the decision to dissolve the festival did not come easily. "We probably should have ended it after 2018, but we tried one more year to turn things around and we weren't successful," Smith said. He says the major challenge was a decline in sponsorship revenue, but says a number of factors contributed to the decision. "We lost money in three of the last five years, and the festival's savings were depleted," Smith said. "The Chamber just can't assume the financial risk of continuing to try to turn it around," he added.

The festival was created in 2003 upon a recommendation of the Hyett-Palma Study, a study conducted in 1999 on behalf of Downtown Petoskey which said the city should have a signature festival. At the time, the third weekend in August was chosen because that was considered the "shoulder season" for tourism and the chamber had hoped to extend the summer business activity.

Organizers with the chamber say the first festival combined some existing community events into one weekend including the Petoskey Jazz Festival, what was then the Petoskey Area Jaycees Arts and Crafts Show, and the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council Lake Expo. The chamber added Shepler's Bay Cruises, the Odawa Jiimaan Challenge (a canoe race across the Bay), a Petoskey Stone Hunt, and a Celebration of the Sunset.

The festival evolved over the years to include a greater variety of entertainment, a children's area, and a variety of food vendors. Festivalgoers of the past will remember bands including Mitch

Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, the zydeco sounds of the Mud Bugs, and more recent performances by the Accidentals and this year, Laith Al-Saadi.

In past years the festival featured train rides, tall ships, petting zoos, chalk art, duck races, a Shakespeare Troupe, and street performers. One of the popular attractions over the years has been the speed-painting work of local artist Martina Hahn. A staple of every festival has been performances by the Petoskey Steel Drum Band.

“We always tried to stay away from the traditional festival events like parades and fireworks and focused more on getting people down to our waterfront area to show off Petoskey’s beauty,” said Nikki Devitt, the chamber’s events and communications director. “We were always proud of the festival’s quality and its quaintness,” she said.

The chamber is grateful to the many sponsors who have supported the festival over the years and to the hundreds of volunteers who contributed thousands of hours to make it all happen. They cited some great leaders who helped to coordinate Festival on the Bay over the years including the first chairperson Gail Smith and the Downtown Coordinator at that time, Tammy Alvaro. Other leaders have included Nikki Devitt and Lisa Hoyt of the Chamber, Roger Tallman, Kathy Bardins, Marcie Wolf, and Johnnie Walker.

“The biggest thank you, though, needs to go to the City of Petoskey,” Smith emphasized. He said the festival would not have been possible without the hard work of the Parks and Recreation Department led by Al Hansen, and now Kendall Klingelsmith. “They shared the chamber’s vision of the festival over the years and worked tirelessly to make it run smoothly. We could never overstate the hard work of the city crews; they’ve been amazing.” Smith said.

Smith says the festival was a lot of hard work for the chamber staff and volunteers but was always a “labor of love.” “We’ll miss it for sure, but we can now shift our energy toward strengthening some other chamber programs and toward looking for that next new thing,” he said.