

Canonsburg comes together for St. Pat's annual parish festival

By Christie Campbell

Staff writer

chriscam@observer-reporter.com

CANONSBURG - Much has changed since Jay Miller's first year with the St. Patrick Catholic Church parish festival, when he was instructed to procure carpenter's nails for the following year.

To save money, he was instructed to remove the old nails from worn lumber, straighten them by pounding them with a hammer and then spray them with WD-40.

In order to make a profit, that was how the festival operated nearly 30 years ago. Fortunately today, if nails are needed someone heads to the nearest hardware store and purchases them.

And what used to be a half-mile of electrical wire loosely strung and taped together to provide electricity is now, thanks to Miller's Zap Electric company, all up to code.

This year's free festival runs from 5 to 11 p.m. June 12-14. Recently, members of the committee gathered to reminisce about past festivals. As they often do whenever they get together, they laughed over past incidents and made empty threats about resigning and turning the event over to people much younger.

Dave and Kathy Fontana are chairing the event for what they think is the seventh or eighth year with Rich Gottschalk as their No. 2 man. The No. 2 man, everyone said, pays attention to details.

"It was a fundraiser, but if you ask anyone, it is definitely a fellowship community-building (endeavor)," Kathy Fontana said of the reason behind the festival's beginnings in the 1950s.

Revived by Henry York in the 1970s, the parish festival has become a community event, not only in attendance but in the efforts to get it up and running. People who aren't church members assist with preparations and Gottschalk was quick to add some of their best volunteers "are Presbyterian."

Planning begins the prior fall with a "wrap-up" meeting. By January, the committee is renting tents, securing entertainment and seeking sponsors.

Saturday, the physical part of it begins as all the stored material is pulled out of the Quonset hut, including pipe, canvas, chairs and wiring. Then the booth assembly begins and tents are erected.

Monday, Miller and his crew will complete the wiring, and a rented stage usually arrives on Tuesday.

In the meantime, church women are in the kitchen preparing food. Marsha Kulakowski oversees the assembly of 2,800 pierogies to accommodate the festival.

The support and generosity of parish families becomes obvious as the festival committee's wish list is filled. Items from soft drinks to paper products begin arriving at the church.

One little-known detail, after everything is packed up and put away for next year, is that the Rev. John J. Batykefer holds Mass at the end of the last night, sometimes as late as 1 a.m. Not only do the volunteers have an opportunity to unwind and worship together, but it also means they don't have to get up to attend church the next day.

For more information, visit www.stpatrickparish.net.