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Portland Oktoberfest event grows in popularity

2010 festival sees increase in visitors

By *TOM THELEN*
tthelen@lsj.com

PORTLAND - The third annual Portland Oktoberfest celebration was only half as long as the first two events, but proved to be twice as popular.

The Oktoberfest celebration was held on Oct. 16 in downtown Portland. Unlike the first two years of the event which were two-day festivals, this year's celebration was held in one day. However, members of the Portland Main Street program, which hosts the event, were very pleased with the results.

"I thought that it went very well this year," said Patrick Reagan, Main Street manager/DDA director. "We had quite a few people come out early and had a full tent later in the evening. I think everyone is happy with the entire day."

"I thought this year's event was very well done," said Joel VanSlambrouck, chairperson of the Main Street Board. "The vendors I spoke with indicated that they want to come back next year. Our main sponsor, WION radio, did a live remote at the site. We had great entertainment, great food, and some fun activities."

The day began with the second annual Big Beer 5K run. The race began near the Veteran's Memorial Bridge and was run on the Portland Rivertrail using the Bogue Flats loop.

"We had 70 runners in this year's race," said Reagan. "We had a lot of positive comments about the race and the course so it will definitely be back again next year."

The majority of Oktoberfest events took place in or around a tent set up in the city hall parking lot. Among the activities was a craft beer tasting session offered by Eric Frederick.

"The craft beer tasting was a very popular event," said Reagan. "He was only going to do one session, but did one or two more sessions after his first one. It was a fun event and just added to what we had to offer. And we plan on bringing it back next year."

Visitors to Oktoberfest found numerous vendors offering a variety of arts and crafts outside the tent. Inside the tent, visitors could purchase food from a variety of vendors that included The Pizza Shop, Chocolate Moose and the Portland VFW Post 4090.

"I think our food vendors did very well," said Reagan. "We had a lot of compliments on the variety of food that was available."

Other activities that took place included a euchre tournament, sauerkraut eating contest and a beer stein holding contest.

Live music was played throughout the day from a variety of musicians including the Dave Wells Oompah Band, Jeff Speas, the Groove Regulators and Ned's In Town.

"The pitcher hoisting contest and sauerkraut eating contest were both fun events and the euchre

tournament went well," said Reagan. "Plus we had plenty of great music throughout the day."

Reagan said the event achieved its main purpose of bringing people to Portland.

"I saw a lot of people walking up and down Kent Street," said Reagan. "That tells me that they are not here just visiting Oktoberfest, but they are visiting the local businesses as well. That was our design. We want them to come out, have some great food, listen to some great music and visit the shops and see everything that Portland has to offer."

Reagan said the goal of bringing people to Portland was met over the weekend.

"I did get a phone call from a gentleman in Ionia on Monday after Oktoberfest," said Reagan. "He and his wife had spent part of the day on the Rivertrail but then came to downtown and visited Oktoberfest. He wanted to tell me that they had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed their visit."

"We have a lot of great events going on in downtown Portland," added Reagan. "And the Main Street committee is proud of every one of them."
