

Expo weathers storm

BY ALLISON COLLINS FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE
Sunday, June 28, 2009 1:54 AM EDT



Hannah Albrecht and Ethan Conlin, both 6 from Attleboro study a 'stateue' of William Shakespeare on the steps of the city hall annex in the old post office during Saturday's Expo. The statue is, in reality, Eric Auger of Ten31 Productions. He would subtly move from time to time and Hannah caught on quickly. (Staff photos by Martin Gavin)

ATTLEBORO -- Even a passing thunderstorm couldn't put a damper on the inaugural Expo for the Senses, held Saturday afternoon in downtown Attleboro.

More than 10,000 people from all over the area descended on Park, Pleasant and Union streets for the expo, which featured music, art, jewelry and food from local restaurants.

"I couldn't be happier," said Mayor Kevin Dumas of the event.

Expo-goers had more than five hours to enjoy the food and activities before a brief thunderstorm rumbled through the area shortly after 5 p.m.

"Considering the weather we've been having these past two weeks, we were very, very fortunate," Dumas said Saturday night.



Mark Anderson of North Attleboro gives his 9-month-old daughter a drink of water, one capful at a time, on the common.

Those still at the expo when the rain hit stuck it out, seeking shelter under available tents while the wet stuff came down, he said.

"It didn't necessarily ruin it for everybody," Dumas said.

Before the rains came, kids were bowling in the streets of downtown Attleboro, just one of many activities offered.

More than half of the 10,000 in attendance came through in the first hour, according to Dumas.

"It was our hope that it would be this successful," he said.

Expo-goers had a chance to explore all of their senses, with displays and demonstrations from many local artists, musicians, theater troupes, restaurants and jewelry-makers.

The event was helpful for "highlighting the talent of the artisans and craft persons," Dumas said.

The day was meant to "really bring together things that people like to do," Dumas said.

One of those things was the opportunity to get up-close and personal with a ball python, brought from the Capron Park Zoo. People were allowed to pet the young snake, which was held by zoo docent Nancy Manning.

"When they get scared, they wind themselves into a ball and put their heads inside," which is where their name comes from, Manning said.



The Park St. Food Court was a popular spot at the EXPO Saturday.

Along with another snake, the zoo also brought a live ferret, several animal skull models and one real skull, the head of a jaguar with plastic eyes and mouth reconstructions.

Police and fire personnel were on hand to give demonstrations, including "Freddie" the fire truck, a remote-controlled, talking truck that rolled up to children and talked with them. The man wielding the remote control was also the voice of the truck.

There were many other special attractions for children, including face-painting and bracelet-making. There was also a balloon artist, and a bowling lane was created on the side of the street.

With so much to do, it's no wonder so many area residents came out.

"It's something free and interesting to do in Attleboro," said Joanne Hathaway. "I thought the jewelry was interesting."

"I think this is better than any Wednesday Night Market that they've ever been able to do," Patty Timmons said.

"I was really excited to see the art," said Theresa Timmons, of Norton. "The art, the jewelry, is amazing."

Part of Park Street was turned into "food alley," with 18 food vendors selling sample sized plates for little money and tables set up for visitors' use.

"We specifically went to local restaurants first, and invited them to join in," said Dianne Thurber, who was in charge of marketing for the event.

Vendors paid \$100 to get a spot on "food alley" and got to keep all of their profits.

Dotti and Frank Hicks came to the expo because they thought it was something that they should support. The couple enjoyed the food and were excited to check out the different booths.

"Hopefully they have it again," Dotti Hicks said.

Dumas and other city officials are hoping for the same thing.

The event was staged with the help of a \$25,000 grant from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. Dumas said a representative from the office attended Saturday's event and was happily surprised with how well the expo ran in its first year.

Dumas said he would love to turn the expo into an annual event, and hopes the city's good impression on Saturday will help it secure similar grants in the future.

The Attleboro Arts Museum received a \$5,000 grant from Project Connect that helped to pay for items such as live statues, face-painting, and balloon artists, according to Thurber.

All the music, which was played throughout the day, was free because the musicians and performers volunteered their time, Thurber said.

Organizers were challenged by the state to draw people from as far as 50 miles away to come to the event, Thurber said. So she advertised on the MBTA, all the way up to Boston, on TV and on the radio.

Thurber said the event was to bring people out with something fun and free to do.

"It's great entertainment for families," she said. "It also exposes all the great businesses."

The event took about three months to plan, according to Dumas, and the committee met every single week since April 1 for two hours, according to Thurber.

With the first expo in the books, will now take a breather to look at this year's success and draw upon their experience for future events.

"We couldn't be happier," Dumas said.

Staff Writer Matt Kakley contributed to this report.