

Route to art, crafts, foods & fun



Scores of booths fill Alpenstrasse, otherwise known as West Main Street between Otsego Avenue and Center Street the rest of the year.

The Alpenstrasse began during a conversation over a bridge game.

Ernie Grocock, a longtime member of the Alpenfest committee, said conversation over a bridge game in 1968 turned to the community festival.

People around the table agreed the one thing wrong with the early years of the celebration was that when there were no activities scheduled, there was nothing to do.

The idea of a street with artists' booths was discussed, Grocock said, and the following March he found himself in charge of procuring artists for the newly - created Alpenstrasse.

"I knew nothing about artists," he said.

Grocock said he contacted the Oakland University's continuing education program and a group of artists agreed to bring their wares.

The group returned for the next two or three years, he said.

"They brought pure art; no crafts," he said.

Pottery, chalk drawings, oil and water color paintings, and original jewelry and handblown glassware were among some of the exhibits, he said.

"Our criteria was the artist had to make it," Grocock said.

Wares could not be bought elsewhere and brought to be re-sold at Alpenfest, he added.

One year, he said, an artist brought a Polaroid camera and took pictures of 140 people, then sent them their portraits he had drawn in chalk.

For the first few years, the Alpenstrasse booths were located on Court Street and in a parking lot opposite the County-City Building.

"My family and I built the booths in our front yard," Grocock said.

Later, the Alpenstrasse included children's games, food booths, and craft items, he said.

Three years ago the Grand Parade was rerouted, he noted, to allow the booths to be left up the remainder of Saturday. Previously, the booths were taken down at noon on Saturday to allow the parade to course straight through Main Street downtown.

In recent years, the number of booths has grown to include an Ethnic Alley for food and a wide variety of wares.

Grocock said one of the successes of Alpenfest and the Alpenstrasse has always been the anonymous contributions of community people in both time and materials.

Grocock said he continues to be enthusiastic about Alpenfest.

"If I sound like I'm high on Alpenfest, it's because I am," he said.

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