



Alpenfest, Inc. headquarters is the Gaylord / Otsego County Chamber of Commerce building.

Year-round planning for Alpenfest Inc. teams

Since 1973, Alpenfest has been an incorporated entity — an effort to insure the solvency of the festival, according to officials.

The Alpine Festival, as it was first known, began as an activity of the Gaylord / Otsego County Chamber of Commerce.

But according to Ed Calkins, a former chamber director, it was difficult to raise funds for both the chamber and the festival and to staff the many committees.

"The difficulty was to get committees to take the responsibility to do these various jobs," Calkins explained. "And one of the big things about it was the funding."

With success setting the Industrial Development Corp. as a separate entity under the chamber umbrella, Calkins suggested the same format could be used for the newly renamed Alpenfest.

Calkins said that gave the festival a better source for separate funding and involvement, while retaining chamber leadership.

"It's worked well since then," he noted. "It gave the people a distinct responsibility for the work that had to be done. The structure could be much stronger at that point."

A board of directors was elected and its retained volunteer general manager Jim Mongeau in a similar, but paid position.

Mongeau receives a \$1,000 salary and \$1,000 for expenses.

Calkins said being a subsidiary of the chamber helps maintain harmony and continuity as volunteers change from year to year.

"We wanted the chamber of commerce to be the strength," he said. "I think it's worked that way."

The copyrights for Alpenfest symbols, including the sketch of Herr Gessler, are registered under the chamber.

But while the structure of Alpenfest Inc. has cemented the efforts of the volunteers, it is the volunteers who work year-round who are the bulwark of the festival.

Mongeau said planning for the annual event begins in October when new members are sought.

"That's when officially everything starts," he said.

Some 70 committees coordinate the efforts of countless volunteers.

Some committees, like that for the jump rope contest, consists of one person. Others, like the queen competition, have about 20 members.

While others' thoughts are on fall and winter activities, volunteers are arranging entertainment and trying to secure parade entrants for the following summer.

Others help assure the Alpenfest float appears in some 17 parades across the state each year.

Mongeau credited the success of the festival to the people and businesses willing to give time, materials and money to Alpenfest.

"There cannot be another place in this world like Gaylord," he said. "You ask for anything to be done, and it's done."

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