

DeKalb Kite Fest draws out-of-state crowd

By KATIE FINLON - Shaw Media correspondent

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DeKALB – Jim Overmann lives in Marion, Iowa, with his family, but as a former DeKalb resident and kite enthusiast, he attended several kite-flying events and thought that DeKalb should have its own kite fest.

Overmann said he loved the idea of a good family event such as a kite festival, and he started flying kites in 2002. A few years later, he made the DeKalb Kite Fest happen, and he even got city officials to come to it, including then-DeKalb Mayor Frank VanBuer.

“My son was in fourth grade, and he wrote a letter to him – they were told to write a persuasive letter to somebody important,” Overmann said. “And so all the kids are like, ‘I’m gonna write a congressman or to the president,’ and Nathan says, ‘Nope, I’m going to write to the mayor to see if he’ll come to our kite festival.’ ”

Overmann said his son eventually got a call from VanBuer saying that he would attend the event, and VanBuer kept coming to the festival every year until he died from pancreatic cancer in 2008.

After a few years of running the annual event, Overmann said he handed it over to the city and, eventually, the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

On Sunday, he and his family attended the event at the North 40 lot on Northern Illinois University’s campus as spectators.

“It’s kind of nice to come and fly and relax,” Overmann said.

Overmann said he was at a kite festival Saturday before DeKalb's, and that one had kite flyers and no spectators.

"This is just so great to see all the people," Overmann said.

Debbie Armstrong, executive director for the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau and co-chairwoman for DeKalb Kite Fest, said about 3,000 to 5,000 people come every year to the event, judging from the number of cars parked throughout the day.

Armstrong said the festival is a way for families to get outside and have fun together, and is sort of a "throwback to when things were simpler." She said kite flyers from Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana and other states also attend the festival.

"I mean, where could you see anything like this for \$3? And that's if you drive and park, because we have to cover a rental cost," Armstrong said. "But where could you see this many kites? These kites, most of them are over 90 feet in length, and I don't know where you could see that."

Rick Wild of DeKalb and his wife, Corie, brought their 5-year-old son, Jack, to the kite fest this year. Wild said he thought it would be a fun event to bring his family to because he likes kites, saw photos of the festival from past years and liked what he saw.

"You don't usually get to see so many kites all in one area," Wild said.

David Zavell of Chicago Kite, who also helped out with the event, said the event brings all walks of life together who might not even know each other until they meet through kite flying.

"I mean, I've got people out here that are doctors, got people out here that are lawyers, I got engineers, I got people that don't work. ... I mean, it just brings them all together," Zavell said.

Charlie Mazzulla, president for the Wisconsin Kite Club, agreed. He said he has met a neurosurgeon, truck drivers and a computer systems professional just at the Sunday event.

“And when we get together, all we talk about is really kites,” Mazzulla said. “All the stuff you see in the world going on, with the political world – we got different views, but we don’t talk about them.”

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