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## KidsFest moves to Merrimack Street

Longtime downtown event starts off summer with a bang

By Peter Francis [pfrancis@eagletribune.com](mailto:pfrancis@eagletribune.com) May 5, 2018



Zuleyka Aleman of Haverhill plays with her son Elizeo Alema, and friends Aubrey Jorge and her brother Josiah Jorge in the water fountain behind Harbor Place in the Pentucket Bank Plaza during KidsFEST in Haverhill.

Tim Jean



HAVERHILL — New location, same great time.

Such was the feeling Saturday afternoon as thousands of people packed Merrimack Street for KidsFEST, the annual pre-summer fiesta put on by the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce.

In the past two decades, the festival has been held in several locations, but mostly in Washington Square. But this year, with dozens of vendors, games, and performers, the festival moved a few blocks east to Merrimack Street.

Event organizers were pleased with the layout of this year's event, which included a wrestling ring and a performing stage near the Merrimack Street parking garage.

The event's coordinator, Melissa Seavey, said shortly after the event's kickoff that she expected over 4,000 people to visit KidsFEST that day.

Bryan Chase, a Haverhill attorney, has been involved with the festival since the 1990's, when his mother, Laurie Chase, helped run the event as the city's events coordinator from 1994 to 2003. Chase's mother passed away in 2006.

With three children of his own, who grew up coming to the event and now help him at the Kiwanis Club booth, Bryan Chase said that while his mom is no longer physically running the event, she is still in downtown Haverhill each May.

"She'd be proud to see what it's blossomed into," he said.

The chamber's former CEO, Beverly Donovan, was on-hand to help out her former colleagues put on KidsFEST, which drew multiple major sponsors including Haverhill Bank, LowellFive Bank, Trinity Ambulance Service, and Covanta Energy.

"It was always the highlight of the summer, and it seems like it's grown since I've been here," said Donovan, who left the chamber earlier this year to become the economic development coordinator in Derry, New Hampshire. "It's good to have it here as opposed to Washington Square."

Haverhill residents took advantage of the over 70 degree weather, many of whom have made it a start to their summer since they themselves were kids.

State Rep. Juana Matias, D-Lawrence, grew up in Haverhill and was in attendance campaigning for congress. She said it's changed since she was young, but maintained the same fun-filled atmosphere.

“There used to be a small goldfish pond they’d bring down to Washington Square,” Matias said with a smile between handshakes with prospective voters. “It’s much bigger than when we were kids, it’s a great event for people to connect with the community.”

Only a few yards away, Nikkie Lemieux of Haverhill was taking in the sun with friends and her children, Ryan, 5, and 14-month old Zaleina. Lemieux said she’s been coming to the event her whole life and is happy to share it with her kids.

“It’s fun. You see a bunch of people you know and meet new people,” she said.

But parents and their own children weren’t the only ones taking in the day. Debbie Veilleux and her husband Leo made the short drive over the river from Bradford to take in the festivities with their three-year old grandchildren, Claire and Coleman.

Leo Veilleux said the event is one they enjoy taking their grandkids to each year.

“We’ve only been down a few times, but decent weather makes it so much better,” said Leo Veilleux.

“It’s more open here, you can see the water,” she said, pointing to the boardwalk along the Merrimack River that runs behind Harbor Place, where people were enjoying some of the fried dough, slushies and kabobs they’d purchased from vendors on Merrimack Street.

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