

Strawberries Lure Crowds

Safety Ingredient of Festival's Success

STORY AND PHOTO BY RON PRESTON
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LASALLE

Colin Vassell never misses an opportunity to visit LaSalle for the annual Strawberry Festival.

"We come for the strawberries and ice cream and all the little shops and stuff set up here," the Windsor resident said Saturday afternoon. Vassell and his fiancée, Paula Gauthier, were taking a break after a day of wandering through Gil Maure Park with their family.

"The kids love the rides," he said, "and there's nothing like it in Windsor, so we come every year."

People from Windsor and Detroit make up the bulk of the visitors, said festival chairman Ray Renaud.

"We had 20,000 people out here Friday night," he said. "If you think about it, that means the entire Town of LaSalle would have been here."

Worth Marking

Renaud said the 12-year-old festival attracted about 35,000 this year and has become well-known as a family event worth marking on the calendar. It also attracts vendors from as far away as Montreal and North Bay.

LaSalle's Sue Ryrie hasn't missed the event since returning to the area after eight years in British Columbia. She enjoys the small-town atmosphere and the feeling of security.

"I just feel safer here," she said. "We won't go to downtown Windsor anymore," after an incident at the Freedom Festival where two groups of teens got into a fight with baseball bats. Her six-year-old daughter, Sarah, was also excited she was taking home a "real fish" she'd won on the midway.

Renaud agreed the weather and entertainment were the key attractions this weekend, along with the 5,550 pints of strawberries prepared and served by LaSalle's firefighters.



Two-year-old Ashley Taylor of LaSalle finished third Saturday in a strawberry and whipped cream eating contest for children under five. The town's annual three-day festival attracted berry lovers from Detroit and throughout Essex County