

# Strawberries get Warm Welcome Despite Weather.

By Brian Cross / Star Staff Reporter

**LASALLE** - The most comfortable person at the parade this bone-chilling Saturday morning was... a strawberry.

"It's nice in here - it's not hot, it's not cold," 14-year-old Laura Fram testified from the inside of her sleeping-bag-like costume during her first stunt ever as a mascot for the LaSalle Strawberry Festival.

Fram was one of the lucky ones. Most spectators - and we're talking about thousands who lined the street for this increasingly popular event - were bundled up in blankets, bouncing up and down on lawn chairs to keep warm, and palming precious cups of steaming coffee and hot chocolate as they waited for the parade to meander down Front Street.

"I'm really cold," shivered Celeste Laforet, 6, as she and three other young-sisters hid from the biting wind beneath a plastic sheet.

But it was a hardy group, warmed with the excitement of anxious to see the parade and to scramble for candy tossed to them by passing paraders.

"Weather doesn't dampen our spirits, right guys?" LaSalle resident John Clarke asked his huddling pair of kids.

Attendance is increasing every year, partly because the town is growing and partly because more people from other

places are attending, spectators said. "It's getting the whole community out, and not just the community but people from all over," said longtime LaSalle resident William Damphouse. "And there just aren't that many parades around these days."

His wife Jill declared - without a hint of irony - that the parade "marks the beginning of summer."



Waving at Strawberry Parade in LaSalle are, from left, Shera Bennette, 4, Tarik Murphy, 6, and Tara Murphy.

The children like it when the town officials toss out their strawberry candies, when the big inflated floats wallow down the road, and when other children they recognize from school walk by as members of clubs, teams, or bands. "But i never knew it was going to be so cold," said Patty Benjamin, 9.

The festival wrapped up Sunday, after a weekend organizers are labeling a resounding success despite the bad weather Friday night and Saturday. It started six years ago, "to give people a reason to come to LaSalle," said festival chairwoman Marg Bowers. "A lot of people used to just drive through."

Bowers estimated about 50,000 people attended during the three-day event. It was expected participants consumed between 13,000 and 15,000 bowls of strawberries.

Things have changed. LaSalle has grown as more people move into new homes in the area. Neighbourhoods are teeming with children.

Turnout for Friday night's rock 'n' roll show was "just awesome," said Bowers, as families bopped about the park to the sound of the Crystals. Saturday the people returned, enduring the cold and the clouds that threatened rain, to see classic cars, a baby contest, and then a country hoedown featuring singer Shelly West.

Sunday's fine weather helped bring more people out on the final day for such events as a pancake breakfast, sports competitions, a magician's show for the kids, and the wrap up of the weekend with a show by the shieks of R & B.

"There's something for everyone," Bowers said.

There wouldn't be such a turnout at a larger town, said LaSalle resident Chuck Caza, who brought his children to see the parade. Bill McCord, who towed his

two-year-old grandson on a wagon, said it was especially impressive that so many people came out in such terrible weather.

"It's a home town thing," he said.