

# 20,000 Have a Berry Good Time at LaSalle Fest

“It was incredible!”

That was the only way organizer Judy Recker could describe LaSalle’s third annual Strawberry Festival over the weekend. She estimated about 20,000 people took part in the festivities, up about 10,000 from last year.

The crowds whooped as cloggers swirled their red frilly skirts on an outdoor stage and contestants stuffed strawberries and whipped cream into their mouths in seconds flat. They got sunburns on Saturday and were cooled down by wind Sunday. But nothing could deter the crowds along Front Road Park.

“I’m just thrilled,” Recker said from her information and t-shirt booth, surrounded by 85 food and craft tables.

Firefighters sold about 4,000 servings of strawberries and ice cream at their booth (that’s about 960 quarts of berries). At the pancake breakfast Sunday, about 1,000 servings (3,00 pancakes) were dished out from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Ethnic food booths filled stomachs with treats such as smoked sausages, gyros and tacos. Pony rides, clowns, dancing, and talent shows provided entertainment. New to the festival was a petting zoo.

The Sandwich West Secondary School stage band played Saturday night as well as the New Kingdom Missionary Baptist Young Adult Choir and the LaSalle Community Choir. At night festival-goers listened to music from Vibe Tribe. Rose City gymnasts and the Boarder City Cloggers also performed.

On Sunday the Silver and Strings instrumental musicians, a talent show, and strawberry-eating contest were the main attractions.

Winners from the talent show in the grade 1 to 8 category included: cloggers Michael

Balestini, Peter Vitale, and Wayne Rigley who took first place, Irish dancer Elizabeth Dupis in second, and clogger Laura Butcher finished third.

In the 15-year-plus category rap dancers Jason Shrinkar, Matt Seguin and Jayme Hall took first place, Christian singers Michael and Carrie Lanbute were second, and dancers Anne Marie Kelly and Stacey Sylvester finished third.

The Strawberry-eating contest proved to be a messy adventure. First-place winners Dawnn Wortman, Gerry St. Pierre, and Josie Brenton gulped down a plate of strawberries topped with whipped cream in record time.

And best of all, said Recker, no strawberries had to be imported, unlike last year, when local berries weren’t ready.

“They’re all from Ontario and lots are even from LaSalle,” she laughed. “You can tell by the taste.”

The festival was organized by Sandwich West Township and LaSalle’s Business Improvement Association.