Success story as performers draw hundreds, engage children

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY—Starla the Storyteller is whirling and twirling, her solid turquoise blouse, purple patterned Indian skirt and nearly waist-length black wavy locks holding scores of children's eyes, her belly dancing coin chain and the finger cymbals on her left hand casting sharp, tinny sounds across a Ewing Park lawn and toward the youths' ears. Somewhere out there in the crowd at the sev-
ELLWOOD CITY FALL FESTIVAL AND CAR CRUISE

9,000 largest crowd yet!

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ELLWOOD CITY—The Ellwood City Fall Festival and Car Cruise drew an estimated 9,000 visitors to Lawrence Avenue on Sept. 29, a crowd doubling that of events held in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and one that introduced guests to what Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce officials say is a thriving community.

Those from out of town were surprised by Ellwood City’s proximity to Beaver and Butler counties, “and they loved our downtown atmosphere,” said Raymond Santillo, the chamber’s executive director.

The event also drew 1,100 vehicles to the car cruise and nearly 80 vendors, both records for the four-year-old event.

“This is bringing people into the community,” said Dan Franus, president of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce. “More and more people get to see what a fantastic treasure this is in Ellwood City, not only for this festival, but they get to see what type of facilities, what type of restaurants and what type of businesses that we have.

“We hope that they decide on a day when we don’t have a fall festival they can come back to a restaurant and they can come back to the businesses. This promotes the community as a whole.”

“I love the water fountains”

Brian Aunkst, a Geneva College student from Milton, was among those admiring automobiles that lined both sides of blocks.

Joe Miller and his daughter, Zoey, walk through the crowd at the Ellwood City Fall Festival and Car Cruise on Sept. 29.

SPONSORS & VENDORS

Sponsors of the 2018 Ellwood City Fall Fest and Car Cruise were McElwain Motor Car Company, Pittsburgh International Race Complex, Visit Lawrence County, WesBanco, HealthSouth Sewardville, Ellwood City Forge, and Nalco.

Vendors included Adam Walmsley Art, All Things Frilly, American Legion Post 157, Amish Donuts – Sunset Bakery, Auntie Mame’s Aprons, Avada of New Castle, Bankers Life, BodyShop LLC, Boy Scout Troop 806 and Celebrate Recovery.

Also, Chuck Yohman Jewelry, CJ Rombold Engine Builders, Club Hope Foundation Inc., Color Street, Complete Travel Service LLC, Cub Scout Pack 806, Darcelle L. Slappy, Diamond Dance Academy LLC, Diamond Milling Company Inc., D’s Apple Dumplings and Disappearing Ink Airbrush Tattoos.

Also, Elhams Middle Eastern Restaurant and Bar, Ellwood Animal Hospital, Ellwood Area Egg Hunt Committee, Ellwood City Wolverine Football Boosters, Ellwood City Area Historical Society, Ellwood City Kitchen Cabinet, Ellwood City Hospital, Ellwood City Fire Department, Empower NBCA School of Ministry and E-Z Pet Care.

Also, F.E. Smith Counseling Services LLC, First Baptist Church in Ellwood City, Freedom Healthcare Services of Ellwood City, Guardian Protection Services, H&H Tire, Herold’s Original Kettle Korn, House of Figs, Katy’s – Home Style Bakery & More, Kevin Gongaware – Bench crafter and Laine Photography.

Also, Lawrence County Republican Committee, League of Women Voters of Lawrence County, Leaps & Bounds Gymnastics Company, Lifesteps Early Head Start, LuLaRoe Brittany Linko, Mary Jo’s Catering, Mary Beth Spielvogel, Mary Kay Independent Sales Director, MetroPCS, Nicholas Games and NovaCare Rehabilitation in Ellwood City.

Also, Origami Owl Cindy Siebert, Pappy Rick’s Kettle Corn, Patricia Cortez – Child Crafts, Penn Town Dogs, Pittsburgh International Race Complex, PNC on Lawrence Avenue, Reed’s Services, Remnant Sons MC National, Riverside Panther Marching Band and Boosters and Riverside Lions Club.


Also, Vinny’s Pizza, Vintage Grace Boutique, Western PA Region – Antique Automobile Club of America and Young Agency Farmers Insurance.
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“Small Town, Big Living” The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce

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“There is a sense of community”

A change in Ellwood City in the past five years is evident, Lang said. “There is a sense of community,” he said. “Look at things like this. I don’t remember something like this years ago and with this many people showing up. Everyone is having a good time. A lot of families. A lot of kids.”

And a lot of excitement for days in which festivals are not held, Megan Lang said, echoing Franus.

“There are small businesses coming in that are nice to bring your kids to,” she said. “You don’t have to go somewhere else. Things are five minutes away.”

Above, Steve Trputec, right, of Ellwood City, views a 1964 Ford Comet at the Ellwood City Fall Festival and Car Cruise. Left, Samantha Rosenberger, of North Sewickley Township, carries a pumpkin through the crowd.

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upon blocks of Lawrence Avenue.

“I love classic cars,” Aunkst said as he stood in line with college friends to have his caricature drawn, “so that is like my big thing.”

The Community Plaza, where musical groups such as Snar-funkle, from New Castle, performed throughout the six-hour event, caught the eye of Grace Weaver, of Indiana.

“I love the water fountains,” said Weaver, also a Geneva College student. “I have never been here before so I never knew what Ellwood City was like.”

They are among those who are witness that Ellwood City is a growing community, Franus said.

“They see the amenities,” he said. “They see the businesses, how many more businesses that there are, they see the community plaza, they see Ewing Park, they see that there is so much activity in this community, where so many other communities are just sort of stagnant.

“They see a vibrance and an excitement in this community.”

“Visitors such as Hayley Ledda, of Lewisburg, and Anna Bouchard, of Bentleyville, weaved through the elbow-to-elbow crowd on Lawrence Avenue holding pumpkins.

Vicki Barger, of Crafton, stood in line at Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ waiting to order cheese fries.

Zoey Miller, of Harmony, strolled alongside her father, Joe, who toted the inflatable horse his 9-year-old daughter won in a game.

And Darrin Havis, of Beaver Falls, his son Dylan and daughter Jenna walked past classic vehicles such as Joel Shaffer’s turquoise 1967 Ford 250, Fran Dero’s 1937 Chevy Coupe, and Laura and Derek O’Neill’s 1967 Pontiac GTO.

“We are happy that things like this are happening in Ellwood City,” said Jeff Lang, a lifelong Ellwood City resident who attended the Fall Festival and Car Cruise with his wife, Meghan, and daughters Dia, 4, and Brielle, 4 months.

“We always talk about this. This is a big thing that we look forward to.

“We have had a countdown in our house for a while now. Dia was very excited about it.”

Dia said she was excited “because it is fall fest.”

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E.C. the toast of the town!

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — Bill Butler and Mike Bartolomeo stepped away from the wide stream of visitors approaching the counter of a beer vendor, raised 3-ounce plastic cups filled with Session IPA and, in the sunshine drizzling through the canopy of stately trees in Ewing Park, toasted the ninth Oktoberfest held in a town, they say, that is worthy of cheers.

Nearby, Heather Pitrelli and Emily Ray did the same, with Redd’s Apple Ale Blueberry. As did Megan Barnes and Courtney Rugh, with Philadelphia Pale Ale.

“There are a bunch of new businesses and I think with the fall festival and this, we are trying to get people into our town to see what it has to offer,” Rugh, a lifelong Ellwood City resident, said during the Oct. 6 Oktoberfest, held seven days after an Ellwood City Fall Festival and Car Cruise attracted a record 9,000 visitors to Lawrence Avenue across town.

The five-hour Oktoberfest, with 100 gate sales in the first 30 minutes in addition to 500 tickets sold in advance, may have also been on pace to top the 850 guests who attended in 2017, said Denny Boariu, chairman of Oktoberfest.

“I like the community vibes”

Boariu is an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce director and member of a Wolves Club that

Amanda Ray, left, of North Sewickley Township; Emily Ray, of Ellwood City; Kaylee Pifer, of Shenango Township; and Heather Pitrelli, of Ellwood City, are shown at the ninth Oktoberfest on Oct. 6 in Ewing Park in Ellwood City. Top photo: A sign promoting Pete’s Uptown Beer & Beverage reflects in the shades of Chelsey DeTullio, of Ellwood City.

Rob Shaffer, of Neshannock Township, participates in a keg toss competition at the ninth Oktoberfest on Oct. 6 in Ewing Park in Ellwood City.

with the Lions and Rotary clubs organized the event that drew Butler, Bartolomeo, Pitrelli, Ray, Rugh and Barnes – who lived five years in the Pittsburgh suburbs and returned to Ellwood City 18 months ago.

“I like the community vibes,” Barnes said. “After getting the city experience it is good to be back. Everyone knows each other. It’s good seeing everyone again and
“Small Town, Big Living”

The Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce

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OKTOBERFEST TAPS INTO LOVE OF COMMUNITY

E.C. the toast of the town!

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running into people. We walk in the park all the time and you can stop and talk to people you know for hours.”

Some of those conversations may focus on what Rugh says is a resurgence in her hometown.

“I know that years ago, you had to leave Ellwood City to do things,” she said. “But now there are the dance studios, the gymnastics, ice cream, the bakeries and new restaurants popping up.”

Activities at Oktoberfest were also plentiful, including corn hole and keg toss competitions, live music, a silent auction, food and the sampling of 14 micro or home brews — in addition to more than 100 craft beers offered by Pete’s Uptown Beer and Beverage, according to Matt Walley, a Wolves Club member who served on the Oktoberfest committee with Mike DeOtto and Raymond Santillo.

“Ellwood City is coming alive,” said Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce. “Look at how much fun these visitors are having.”

Added Ray, 25: “Ellwood City is fun time. There is a lot to do around here. This town is coming back. There are a lot of opportunities to have things to do.”

And Pitrelli, 27: “A lot of people have been coming together more in Ellwood City and it has just been awesome to see. It is just great that a community can celebrate with these type of events. That is what Ellwood City is. It’s what really matters.”

Bartolomeo agrees.

“A lot of good things are going on in Ellwood City,” he said. “People are getting involved. The community is growing. I think we are moving in the right direction and you are going to see the numbers moving up.”

The numbers of those also attending Oktoberfest also moved up throughout the afternoon.

“It makes me proud,” Boariu said. “Everyone in Ellwood City works hard and we want people to know what we have here. We have a great community that works very well together. We want to share what we have and hope to continue to grow and prosper our community.”

Rob Brough serves a taste of Crimson Pistol to Ginny Kugel, of Monaca, at the ninth Oktoberfest on Oct. 6 in Ewing Park in Ellwood City.

Bill Butler, left, of Wampum, and Mike Bartolomeo, of Ellwood City, share a toast.

Megan Barnes, of Ellwood City, samples a Philadelphia Pale Ale while Sarah Zielinski, of Ellwood City, tosses a keg during a competition.

William V. Foley/For The Chamber

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“Storytelling is one of the oldest ways in which we share our values, our history, the most important lessons we have for life, and how to deal with life.”

enth Ellwood City Storytelling Festival were Mathew Simpson, and Xavier Carter, 10-year-olds from Ellport; Addyson Karis, 9, and Ellery Hooker, 8, both of Ellwood City; Karlee Witt, 10, of New Brighton; Addison Stivers, 11, of Enon Valley; Rowan Anderson, 5, of Marion Township; Trevor Ritter, 3, of Fombell; and siblings Payton Guzzo, 7, and Harlee Guzzo, 6, of New Castle.

Starla the Storyteller was among six performers Sept. 15 in Ewing Park during a festival coordinated by the Ellwood City Area Public Library, and Ellwood City Community Enrichment -- a subsidiary of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce -- and found herself surrounded by a semicircle of attentive and engaged children.

“Storytelling,” said Misty Mator, an Ellwood City native who portrays Starla, “is one of the oldest ways in which we share our values, our history, the most important lessons we have for life, and how to deal with life. Sometimes a story is just entertaining. Sometimes it is educational. I usually tell stories that have a moral theme, an educational element to them.”

When Mator first began as a storyteller six years ago, at her son’s preschool, “I would tell a story and I would also read a book. I very quickly realized I had the children’s attention more if I was telling a story than if I was reading from the book.”

And she whirled and she twirled and sounded her finger cymbals as she told children in Ewing Park a story about how pumpkins grow and about pumpkin soup.

“When we first got here, the performer was up there, and the children had these faces on like they were ready to go,” said Iesha Guzzo, of New Castle, mother of Payton and Harlee. “I think it is more entertaining when...”

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they get kids involved. I see a lot of kids being involved.” Children were also involved with horse-drawn trolley rides, face-painting and balloon art, then gathered on the lawn before Folino Stage to participate in storytelling — what Mator fears is becoming lost in a world addicted to technology and its devices. “In today’s culture there is so much media,” she said. “There are iPads and televisions and picture books. Not that books are a bad thing. We want kids to be able to learn the literacy aspects, but this right here, looking at them face to face, that is something that is slowly being lost on the newest generation. “The fact that I was looking at them in the face and interacting with them is really what made it come alive for them. That is part of what keeps children’s attention.”

“I like going up there and helping sometimes” Megan McKinney, of Ellwood City, brought her children Jacoby, 8; Bailey, 5; and Sidney, 3; and Cassidy, 9 months, to the festival that on average has drawn 800 visitors a year. “We like the speakers that are here every year,” McKinney said. Bailey said she likes “the stories. I like going up there and helping sometimes.” She added that it was more fun to “do this” than to watch TV.

The Ellwood City Storytelling festival “is such a great way for the community to get together,” Mator said. “You get to have an afternoon with your family and it is appropriate for all ages. You are getting your children outside, you are doing something different, interactive, and I think that makes it special. You are not only enjoying stories, you are also having family time as well. I think that is the draw.”

Starla the Storyteller, portrayed by former Ellwood City resident Misty Mator, entertains children during the seventh Ellwood City Storytelling Festival on Sept. 15 in Ewing Park.

Jacob Lopatin, 5, of Ellwood City, prepares to holster a balloon sword as his mother, Kim Linville, of Ellwood City, smiles during the seventh Ellwood City Storytelling Festival on Sept. 15 in Ewing Park. At left, Daniel D’Andrea, 8, of Shenango Township, pets a 2,500-pound Belgian horse named Rusty.

Other performers were Alan Irvine, Tim Hartman, Bill Pate, Michael Perry and Sharon and Curt Savage. The festival was supported by the generosity of Katy’s Homestyle Bakery, Ellwood City Forge/Ellwood Group, WesBanco, Lawrence County Commissioners, Blanks Concrete, Health South Sewickley, Hoyt Foundation and Caroline Knox Memorial Fund.
ELLWOOD CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CHEF, WINE & ALE

Picture-perfect evening!

Rodger Radevski of Al's Pizza & Sub Palace is shown with Shawn Leopardi of Core 3 Group at the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's 13th annual Chef, Wine & Ale event held at Shakespeare's Restaurant & Pub on Monday, Sept. 10, 2018.

Autumn Minnitte receives a glass of wine as Leslie Richards looks on at the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's 13th annual Chef, Wine & Ale event held at Shakespeare's Restaurant & Pub on Monday, Sept. 10, 2018.

WesBanco was the platinum sponsor for the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's 13th annual Chef, Wine & Ale event held at Shakespeare's Restaurant & Pub on Monday, Sept. 10, 2018.

Carl and Elise Coker, of North Sewickley Township, are shown at the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's 13th annual Chef, Wine & Ale event held at Shakespeare's Restaurant & Pub on Monday, Sept. 10, 2018.

Lynn Gallaher, of North Sewickley Township, won the earrings provided by Kimpel's Jewelers. She's shown between Raymond Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, and Vaughn Hudspath, who served as MC.