

Little Ferry Ocean Church of New Jersey hosts its Second Annual Ocean Festival

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The banner was up, the grill was warming up, vendors were making final arrangements, and the decorators were adding the last touches to the stage and entrance. The Ocean Festival was ready to begin!

On May 27, 2017, the Little Ferry Ocean Church of New Jersey hosted its second annual festival. This year's festival was open to the public, and anyone could come and join. There were more vendors, more games, and a lot of help and volunteers.

Approximately 120 people attended throughout the day, including the staff, which was almost three times as big as in the previous year. As the goal for the festival is to become bigger every year, there were more activities on top of the ever-so-popular goldfish-catching game. There was flag painting, water gun aim, cast net throwing, recyclable toss, waste-no-water race, a group treasure hunt, and the return of the eel-catching game from decades ago when Ocean Festival was held in Jersey City.

The boat rides, of course, were the No. 1 attraction for everyone of all ages. According to the boat captains, Manuel Liba and Benny Axelson, more than 100 people rode on the boats that day. Entire families with their little ones in tow got to experience cruising up and down the Hackensack River as the captains enjoyed swerving around debris from the recent rains, making the ride much more exciting.

Children were everywhere, touching eels for the first time, squirting each other with water guns, munching on hamburgers, hot dogs and ice cream, and starring in an impromptu play called "The Sea Force Rangers and the Gem of Awesome," created and narrated by Dungeon Master Zeth Bell. The grilling was done by our captain and grill master, Steve Kearney, who cooked up and prepared hamburgers and hot dogs together with Kiyoe Tsuji. The hamburgers received many compliments and were by far the most popular and in demand.

Musical talent in our community was showcased as Cynthia Nakai played the accordion, Oaklea Kearney from New York played guitar and sang, Phillip Soaivan also on guitar sang oldies, and Laurel Nakai on the mandolin sang original songs that she had composed.



Other happenings at the stage included the group “ships and sailors” game led by Alex Beebe, testing the young recruits on their knowledge of boating terms. A knot tying demonstration and lesson was conducted by Terry McMahon as he was joined by both young and young at heart on basic knots used by seamen but also useful to landlubbers.

Seven vendors joined the event: custom manga art by Minobu Sato, Hobby World Marine, Leda Project, CARP New Jersey, Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP), Origami by Misora Yamada, and a mini-bazaar by the Little Ferry small group led by Teiko Corona and Yorika Maio.

Preparations for the festival had begun a couple of months earlier, with planning meetings and working with the Little Ferry Borough and Health Department. It can be an intimidating experience, communicating with city officials, but we found all the Little Ferry borough members to be very friendly people. Working with the city borough was also a start to developing a good relationship and possibly working together with their officials and mayor in the future.

Without the time and support of our volunteer team, local captains and the festival committee in putting together games, performances, food and decorations, none of this would have been possible. Teamwork is really an amazing and blessed thing. We hope that next year more members of our community will participate and join in the development of the Ocean Festival so that it can become a great outreach event and we can connect more with our local cities and communities!