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Goodbye summer, hello harvest season

By JAIDA STERLING Special to The Messenger Sep 6, 2018



Kids struggle up the huge hay bale mound to find a beautiful view of the lake. The three-day event had lots of music, old-time contests, games, craft vendors and ended with a big fireworks display.

Messenger photos by John Halley

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The third annual Athens Harvest Festival and Bluegrass Jamboree, held on Labor Day weekend, celebrated the end of summer and the beginning of harvest season through family activities and music.

Although Edward Charles created the festival with farmers in mind, the festival has become a great place for family fun.

Many kids participated in a pumpkin pie eating contest while parents and volunteers watched. A commentator brought laughter and energy to the crowd until time ran out and two of the children were named winners.

Charles then wiped down the tables and picked up leftover pans to prepare for the adult round of the pie eating contest.

But the pie eating contest wasn't all the festival had to offer. They offered different tents for different activities such as the music tent, workshop tent and contest tent. This year, a cornhole tournament, a hot pepper eating contest and five more bouncy houses were added. The festival's giant straw pyramid almost doubled in size compared to last year's pyramid, and organizers also held a raffle.

“There wasn’t much going on on Labor Day around here,” Charles said of how he came up with the idea for the festival. “I wanted to think of something for the farmers to celebrate the end of the hot summer before harvest season.”

The event had an Athens Harvest kitchen that sold food from only local farmers.

“It’s supporting the local economy and it’s delicious and more nutritious than regular fair food,” Charles said.

Many volunteers came to help, including Tyler Bonner, who has volunteered for the festival since it was created three years ago. Bonner runs Zero Waste Event Productions, which is, according to the organization’s website, “a social enterprise helping festivals to decrease their environmental footprint by diverting waste from the landfill through waste reduction, recycling and composting.”

Bonner said he liked that the festival didn’t generate a lot of waste and used reusable cups and plates, but his favorite parts of the festival are the eating contests and the commentator.

“(The festival) is at a really good time in the year and it’s wrapping up the summer,” Bonner noted while volunteering at a beer station. “It’s a great opportunity to celebrate local food, local beer, local people and some good bluegrass music.”

The final act was Billy Strings, who played on a stage covered in pumpkins and hay, and immediately after, a huge fireworks display ended the night and the festival. What a great way to say goodbye to summer.

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