

## **Highlands Festival draws a crowd to Waterloo Village**

### **Second annual music festival raises funds for land conservation**

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*By MEGAN CROUSE, Editor*

Crowds gathered for concerts in front of two stages in Waterloo Village in Byram for the second annual Highlands Festival, hosted by the Boonton-based Highlands Coalition on Saturday, Sept. 20 and Sunday, Sept. 21, which brought music and environmentally friendly activities to the historic village.

Thousands of people attended over the two days of the event, which included vendors, demonstrations, children's activities, a rally car tour, a bike ride, and a link to the People's Climate March in New York City.

It was all in support of the Highlands Coalition, dedicated to preserving clean water and open land in New Jersey's Highlands region.

The Waterloo Village location also featured a re-enactment of a Lenape village, access to and boat rides on a section of the historic Morris Canal, blacksmithing demonstrations, water testing demonstrations, and more.

The coalition aimed to host a completely waste-free event by providing a sorting station instead of traditional trash and recycling containers. Visitors would be directed to sort waste into trash, compostable materials, and recyclables.

Janet and Tim Ryan of Montville came because they were interested in the lineup of musicians, but were browsing hand-made crafts in the mid-afternoon.

"There's such a variety of things here," Janet Ryan said. "And the vendors are all local and all natural. Local is so good."

Christine Allen of Rockaway Township, owner of Mo'Pweeze Bakery, was selling cupcakes. She makes organic, gluten-free cupcakes sold online and in select stores. She said that her

cupcakes are made without seven of the eight most common allergens, such as dairy and soy.

“I’ve gotten a good reception,” she said of the festival. “Someone told me he thought [the cupcake] was going to be awful because it’s missing so many things, but he loved it.”

Tom Shelton of the White Meadow Lake community in Rockaway Township was also displaying his work; sculptures made of found objects like metal utensils or vintage tins.

His creations, displayed under the name What The Folk Art, are inspired in part by Jim Henson creations like the puppets used in the film “The Dark Crystal.”

“I try not to put myself into one style,” he said. “I work with what inspires me. Definitely nature is one inspiration.”

Julia Somers, of Harding Township, Highlands Coalition executive director, worked with festival director Lisa Kelly and the many volunteers to make the event run smoothly. “We’ve been blessed this year with great weather,” she said.

“We hope that the music and all of the other things are intriguing and attractive to people who wouldn’t normally think of themselves as environmentalists. And to learn that we are all environmentalists.”

The location was a perfect one, she said. “It’s an absolute treasure in the Highlands. It’s a thrill to be able to work with the Park Service and to bring awareness to the Highlands.”

Steve Ellis, the regional superintendent of the New Jersey State Park Service, said that the relationship is mutually beneficial. The cost of parking went to the Park Service for the upkeep of the Waterloo Village historic site.

Mark Hiler of Rockaway Township, a member of the Highlands Coalition and a volunteer worker at the festival, has an interest in sustainable energy. He has had solar panels on his house for 10 years, he said, and said that with increasing efficiency and a drop in price, solar energy would soon cost the same as burning fossil fuels for electricity.

“I’m very interested in sustainability,” he said. “We could progress to a point where we didn’t have to burn fossil fuels. Because fossil fuels will eventually run out, or we’ll have to do some crazy things to get to them, like fracking.”

Events like the Highlands Festival, he said, make more people aware of green alternatives to conventional energy sources.

Jim Florence, Joan Lisi, and Judy Schleicher of Denville represented Protect Our Wetlands, Water, and Woods, or POWWW, an environmental protection organization that helped preserve the 600 acres now known as Jonathan's Woods in Denville.

"The Highlands Coalition is a phenomenon," said Lisi. "And we've been with them in some capacity since the beginning."

She had high praise for Somers, who, she said, had been an intelligent and committed activist.

POWWW will be raising funds in the coming months for the planting of thousands of pine trees in an area of Jonathan's Woods off of Old Beach Glen Road which was devastated during Superstorm Sandy.

"They're the movers and shakers of the environmentalist movement," Florence said.

With musicians rubbing shoulders with activists and activities like weaving demonstrations and giant bubble blowing entertaining people of all ages, the Highlands Festival was in full swing on Saturday.

On Sunday, posters made at the festival were part of the wider conversation about green living at the People's Climate March.

A common refrain among vendors was that the second year had been more successful than the first, in part because of the added craft beer garden.

"I'm hoping this festival takes off every year," Lisi said, "because without the Highlands Coalition watchdogging the water and land here, I worry about what's going to happen to north Jersey."