Bittersweet committee should be commended on a job well done

Richard Anderkin
Editor
Mount Vernon Signal

Our hats are off this week to the Bittersweet Festival committee.

Although they had very little time to coordinate the annual event, they did a stellar job.

Main Street in Mt. Vernon was decorated beautifully and there were plenty of activities and entertainment for the young and old alike.

Had it not been for the efforts of Carol Kirby, Phyllis Deatherage, Sherry Hansel, Teresa Bussell, Janet McClure, Sharon Thacker, Lisa Sutton, Chris Kirby and Minnie Kirby, there would not have been a Fall festival in Mt. Vernon for the first time in over ten years.

Other than a very small advertisement in the classifieds, the Mt. Vernon City Council did little to inform the public that no festival was going to be held this year.

One citizen told me that he was basically told that city employees were too busy to manage the festival from city hall.

He said he got the impression they didn't have time because they were so busy counting the tax money generated by the occupational tax.

Part of the blame lies right here with me because I missed a couple of meetings where they discussed the festival and the fact they weren't going to have it - but that still doesn't change the fact that the city could have run a larger, more noticable, public notice asking for help. Citizens were not informed of the council's decision until a short front page story just over a month ago.

That story in this publication was all it took to get the attention of the people mentioned above and the festival was on. As one of them told me, they hated to see the festival just stop.

Although the committee did a fine job coordinating the annual 5K race, they had very few participants compared to past years, when people had plenty of notice.

The poor participation in the race is the fault of the city's because they made little or no effort to have the festival and potential participants made other plans.

While it is not a matter of life or death, it is just another indication of the council's lack of concern for civic affairs.

When Mayor Karen King was pushing for the occupational tax she told interested persons that some of the money would be used to build a new fire house. Plus, the police department is housed in the basement of city hall in less than ideal surroundings.

When you think of actual services you get from the city that you don't pay for dearly on a monthly basis (water and sewer), fire and police protection are about it.

The council is getting a real bargain. The fire department is manned strictly by volunteers and many of the police officers on the city's payroll barely make enough to live on.

The least the council could do is provide better facilities for both departments.

The Mayor and council continue to say they are still catching up on their finances, but who really knows because the council is still way behind on their audits. The last audit completed was for fiscal year 1996-97.

They may think they know where they are at financially, but they don't have anything to back it up and if they do they should share it with the rest us.

Remember those of us who work and own property in the city have a much more vested interest these days in what goes on at city hall. After all we get to pay for the "goings-on."

Points East

By: Ike Adams

I finally gave in last Saturday night about thirty minutes before dark and decided it was really going to frost largely because the outside temperature had already dropped to the freezing point.

I had just finished photographing a wedding and I had breathed on a lens cover I had left lying in the back of the truck just enough to dampen it so that I could wipe it off before stashing it back in my camera bag, but instead of dampening it iced over. I figured that it was going to get even colder before the sun came up again so I sprang into action.

The first action consisted of hustling huge potted ferns and an hibiscus tree into the basement. The second action consisted of heading to the garden with five gallon buckets to salvage anything that looked edible. Suffice it to say that fried green tomatoes will be on the breakfast, lunch and dinner menus at my house for weeks to come. I'm going to try and wrap some up and see if I can time their ripening to Thanksgiving, but I fear they had to be picked too early to make it that long.

At least 10 out of the last 12 years I've managed to have Thanksgiving tomatoes by wrapping them in newspaper and stashing them in the basement and then letting them lie on a widow sill from Monday morning, Thanksgiving week until the turkey is carved. On the other hand, this was the earliest hard freeze I can remember, at least in recent years.

But do not be alarmed. I've double checked with NAWWWWW (National Association of Wooly Worm Winter Weather Watchers) and the forecast for an exceptionally mild winter has not been updated.

According to the woolies I spoke with on Sunday, this first was simply natures way of getting the grasshoppers out of folks' late greens. I brought in a big bag full of kale and mustard the other night and we had grasshoppers all over the house. As far as I know none got cooked with the greens and oh my how good they tasted.

Along with two five gallon buckets of tomatoes in various stages of ripeness, I brought in cucumbers, egg plant, sweet peppers and enough cayenne to supply a Mexican restaurant for the rest of the year. I raised cayenne mostly because it is so pretty, but the variety I get from a supplier in South Carolina is too hot to have any utility for most Anglos.

I piled the stuff up in the kitchen floor and sat down to smoke a cigarette. About a third of the way through the smoke my mouth started burning to the point that I was in pain. I'd forgotten all about the cayenne and had commenced thinking that there must be some sort of chemical in the cigarette. I smoke a brand that is imported from Spain and costs about a third the price of American made so I'm thinking maybe they've left a little sucker spray on the leaves during the processing. Turns out that Spain can import tobacco from the States, then export it back over here ready to smoke far, far cheaper than we can send it to Raleigh, North Carolina to accomplish the same objective. But it's not something I will complain about.

Anyway, I licked on the filter with a part of my tongue that wasn't already burning and the sensation was almost instant. I'm talking hot as in I thought it was going to blister.

I was holding the cigarette and trying to smell the smoke without taking it in my mouth to see if I could tell any difference that way and, of course, the smoke got in my eyes. I instinctively used my left hand to rub my eyes and I honestly thought I was going blind. I headed for the kitchen sink to douse water on my face and there lay my huge pile of pepper plants red as the old devil's horns and I immediately realized the error of my ways.

I did not get instant religion but I was praying under my breath for some relief when it dawned on me that one should never touch anything with his hands until they have been scrubbed down after handling hot peppers. Thank God I didn't have to go the bathroom when I caught on to the source of my dilemma.

What amazes me is that these things will freeze at all. They're so hot that it seems to me frost should not hit within a hundred yards of the garden.

In the meantime, we should have several more weeks of mild weather now which should be ideal for growth in the greens beds and I'm hoping that all the grasshoppers bit the dust over the weekend. Stop by if you want a big mess for Thanksgiving.

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves

Pot of Gold

I may not have found the pot of gold at the rainbow's end or the gold I have been searching for since I have reached the required age where it is supposed to be found, but I can say one thing for sure, "There is gold in them thar hills" across the Smokie Mountains of Tennessee and extending into the village of Cherokee, North Carolina. A person could easily be mistaken and think he has reached his goal of seeing the beautiful fall colors the Smokie Mountains put on display every Autumn when he begins seeing another kind of colorful decorations made by human hands. This is where the fruits of harvest, pumpkins, gourds, squash and flowers of every description become interlaced with matching or contrasting flowers and other fruit of the season, then arranged artistically around a backdrop of hay, cornshocks, trees or entrance way to the place of business or private home. Everyone seems to be competing for the most unusual and elaborate display of the bounties and rewards of the Fall harvest. Or maybe they are competing with nature and giving you a taste of the wonders of color lying ahead. Soon after we passed the "Dollywood sign" where our loudest Oh, WOW, was uttered at the "Fall wedding" display, complete with a small church made of cornshucks, steeple and all, a beautiful bride doll in wedding clothes at the door, a groom and attendants dressed in tuxedo, close by, our quick view, we were driving by, gave the impression of many more things we had missed.

Thanks to Chuck and Polly, knowing how well I love fall colors and the singing water of a mountain stream, invited me along on their annual trip to the Smokies and Cherokee, South Carolina where we spent the last three days. Now we were climbing the mountain, leaving Dollywood and Gatlinburg behind, both already teeming with those seeking excitement and souvenirs. Our excitement lay ahead as we watched the leaves change gradually from deep green to those with an occasional clump of gold or red peeping through. Then a bright red tree would appear nestled between two tall pines on the far side of the mountain facing us. As we neared Clingsmen Dome more evidence of fall was in the color scheme. The leaves were every shade of yellow, from the color of rich cream to that well beaten egg yolks, where only a spring of red could occasionally be seen, probably from a maple sprout, slipping an unwary branch into the scene, as if it was dipping into the butter bowl.

The far away mountain, with grey mist from the recent rain rising from the bed of color beneath, was spectacular, for much of the dominate yellow had turned to burnished gold and mingled with the red, now making dramatic appearances on the mountainside, was enhanced by the deep green border of tall stately pines marching along the brim. They seemed to know such color as we were looking at needed a filler of green to enhance the scene. Everywhere one looked the scene had changed and another just as beautiful took its place. The Mountains in the distance, silhouetted against the grey sky, was a three dimensional picture, with faintly colored leaves beneath, and other mountain ranges fading into the distance as they seemed to get smaller and smaller. What a picture it made!

That night we spent at the Lodge, our room opening onto the balcony overlooking the active stream of water straight from the mountains. Wonderful! Rippling water dashing over rocks then settling into small pools of clear water, where a fisherman was quietly and patiently waiting for "a bite." And I listened to the music of gurgling water.

Saturday morning we were joined by Chad and Angie for an unforgettable weekend of sight seeing, catching up with news and eating. No, I can't begin to describe all we saw or what we ate. The important event for the day was the train ride to "Lake Fontana." We had the privilege of riding in an open car which gave us a better view of the scenery and river activities and made us appreciate the extra clothes we had on. One of the most memorable sights on the trip was the caves above the railroad that the guide said was the one the Indians lived in when the white people chased them out of their own country and made them march into a strange land out west. This was called the Trail of Tears. The ominous look of that cavern in the hillside, and being told it was lived in by people trying to save their lives and homes will haunt me the rest of my life.

We waved the adventurers in colorful kayaks tumbling in the river below, while skillfully dodging rocks and whirlpools. Fontana Lake was being drained so repairs could be made before spring so all we saw of it were small isolated lakes and the bottom where once stood buildings and the remnant of an old railroad track. The trip back to the starting place was uneventful except for one incident when someone pulled the wrong rope and caused the brakes to lock, or loose the air out of them, and the engineer stopped long enough for it to be corrected. All in all it was a wonderful venture and one not to be forgotten soon.

One more little bit of description of our homeward bound drive over the mountain. As we neared Kingsmen Dome the top of the mountain in the distance looked white, we all thought snow, the first of the year. Farther down we saw heavy frost on the leaves, then ice, I think this may have been the prettiest scene yet. The sprinkling of frost on colored red and gold leaves with dainty icicles hanging from them made one want to ring bells and sing a Christmas Carole.

Thanks to Chuck, Polly, Chad and Angie, I have had a wonderful weekend. Even a long wait outside the IHOP, didn't take away the joy of a pancake brunch or dim the beauty of FALL COLORS.

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