

Reviews are in: Everyone's cheering Lowell Folk Festival

By Rick Sobey
 rsobey@lowellsun.com

LOWELL — It's usually a hot and humid July weekend, when paramedics receive many calls for dehydrated attendees.

There can be an occasional thunderstorm, scattering festival-goers from the downtown streets.

But this year was a pleasant change with superb weather throughout the weekend, Lowell Folk Fest organizers repeated on Monday — a day after the very successful 31st annual festival.

"It was amazing," said Arthur Sutcliffe, board chairman of the Lowell Festival Foundation. "I'm getting feedback that it was the best festival we've put on.

"If I could clone this weather every year, that'd be fantastic," he added.

Spectacular weather and entertainment led to large crowds and lengthy lines each day, which had a positive impact on downtown businesses and restaurants, organizers said.

By Sunday afternoon, some festival food vendors were running out of dishes, including pierogies and baklava sundaes.

It's difficult to say exactly how many people attended the festival because

Please see **FESTIVAL/8** attendees don't buy tickets — it's free admission — but the Lowell Festival Foundation executive director estimated at least 150,000 people.

That's based on the initial count of sold-out parking garages and lots, attendees traveling to the festival on the Commuter Rail, and other tabulations.

"It was definitely one of the best we've had," said Craig Gates, the executive director. "People were coming out in droves with the great weather, and it never got too hot."

Last year, there was high humidity during the festival, so water bottle sales fell 16 percent this year. That might have been the only food or drink item that plummeted in sales.

"People were more comfortable," Gates said. "We'd rather sell less water than people fall over from heat stroke."

The musical groups were phenomenal, Sutcliffe stressed.

He credited the National Council for the Traditional Arts for aligning the great talent.

"People were really getting into the music," he said. "Everybody was in just such a good mood, and there were no problems, no altercations, no downers all weekend."

Police Superintendent Bill Taylor reported only a few minor incidents, including a juvenile getting arrested for disorderly conduct.

The barricades, preventing vehicles from entering the downtown streets, worked out "exceptionally well," Taylor said.

"It was a very good weekend all around, and not an abundance of medical calls," he said.

Downtown businesses and restaurants were packed, including Cobblestones, which had a music stage and sold drinks outside.

It was one the busiest Folk Fest weekends for the restaurant, said General Manager Robin Dupell.

"When there's that many people in the city, it impacts everyone for the better," Dupell said. "And



there's a good chance they'll come back."

Rich Bolton, the new executive director of the Cultural Organization of Lowell (COOL), said that people gravitate to these street events — where the downtown gets shut down. Many attendees said they would return for COOL's event Creaticity on Sept. 16 and 17, when Market Street is closed to traffic, Bolton said.

"It'd be great for the city to have something like this every month," he said. "They're a lot of work to put on, but if everyone gets behind these events it could be successful."

As always, there were numerous volunteers across the Folk Festival. Many collected donations for the Bucket Brigade. Danielle McFadden, of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, said she's not sure if it's a record-

breaking year for the Bucket Brigade, but she's "feeling very positive."

"The weather was perfect, and the patrons all seemed to be in a giving mood," she said.

The parade Friday evening really set the tone for the weekend, according to Celeste Bernardo, superintendent at Lowell National Historical Park. She was dancing from City Hall all the way to Boarding House Park, twirling an American flag umbrella.

"That band was awesome," Bernardo said. "It was just a blast all weekend long."

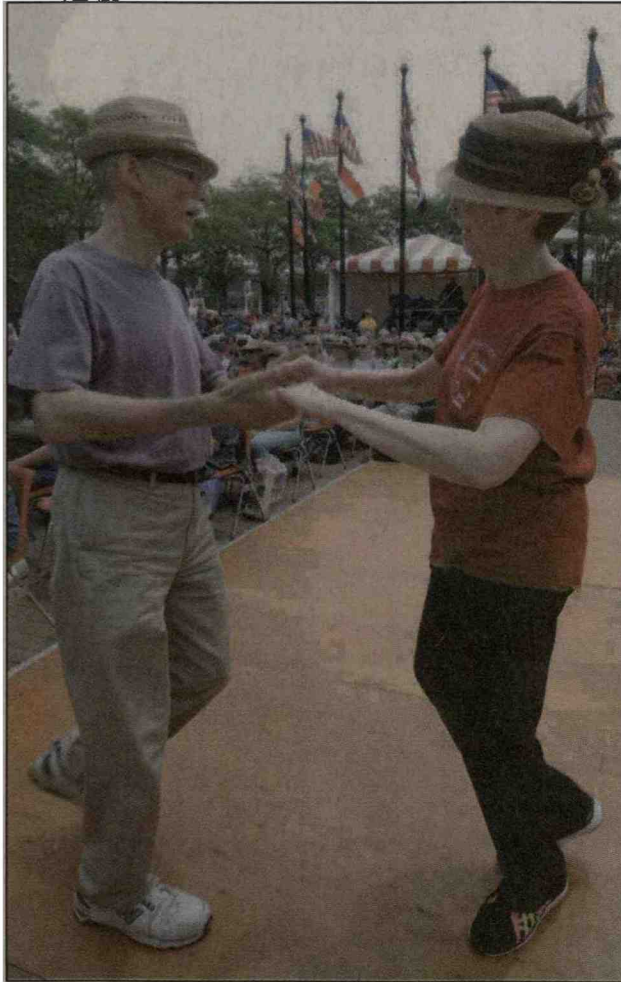
Follow Rick Sobey on Twitter @rsobeyLSun.

"People were coming out in droves with the great weather, and it never got too hot."

Craig Gates, executive director of the Lowell Festival Foundation



Saturday's audience at JFK Plaza claps along with [Vishten's](#) Acadian music during the 31st Lowell Folk Festival. **See a slide show at lowellsun.com.** SUN/JULIA MALAKIE



Charles Worsley and Ruth Evans, both of Lowell, dance to Acadian music of Vishten at JFK Plaza during Saturday's installment of the Lowell Folk Festival.

SUN/ JULIA MALAKIE