

IN OUR 179TH YEAR

The County Press

Locally Owned — Locally Connected — Locally Committed

Vlasic Community Fest set for May 10-13

Official: 'Not called a pickle festival'

BY ANDREW DIETDERICH
810-452-2609 •
adietderich@mihomepaper.com

IMLAY CITY — Imlay City officials may have opted to not have a pickle festival replace its Blueberry Festival, but a festival that has an awful lot to do with pickles is headed to the Eastern Michigan State Fairgrounds next month.

Vlasic Community Fest is set for Thursday, May 10 through Sunday, May 13.

The event is meant to celebrate the hundreds of workers at Vlasic Foods, as well as the community that supports the company, said Ian Kempf, a member of the Eastern Michigan Fair Board and manager of the Eastern Michigan



Photo by Jeff Hogan

Vlasic Community Fest will celebrate the contribution of the hundreds of workers at the Vlasic Pickle plant in Imlay City. In peak packing season, employment swells to more than 600 employees.

State Fair.

But, he said, don't call it a "pickle festival."

VLASIC on page 16A

(Story continues below)

“What Vlasic really wants to do, and I appreciate this, is they want to show some appreciation to their employees for all the hard work those folks do, and they want to show some appreciation to the community for supporting them in their endeavors,” Kempf said. “That’s the driving force behind this.”

“That’s why it’s not called a pickle festival,” Kempf also said. “It’s called the Vlasic Community Fest...their desire was to give back to the community.”

Dean Zaretzke, plant manager, Vlasic Foods in Imlay City, did not return a phone call and email left Friday before press time.

Kempf said Vlasic Community Fest has essentially come together in the last month. The sponsorship agreement was signed about two weeks ago, he added, and an event schedule is in the process of being finalized.

However, it will run Thursday through Sunday that week.

Saturday will be considered the “main day,” Kempf said, featuring the bulk of the activities that include a “Bump N Run” race.

Additionally, Kempf said, Skerbeck Family Amusements will set up a carnival. Concessions also will be a part of the event. Other activities, such as a pickle-eating contest, are being planned, Kempf said.

Everything (including parking, admission, and the Bump N Run) will be free for attendees. The only thing that will cost money will be food, drinks and rides.

Kempf said the idea of an actual “pickle festival” was floated last year when officials were deciding how to replace the Imlay City Blueberry Festival. Officials ultimately renamed and rebranded it as Michigan Busker Festival, scheduled for June 15-16.

However, he said, having a pickle festival in Imlay City without heavy involvement from Vlasic didn’t make a lot of sense.

Because of the growing season, Vlasic could only be involved in a festival in April or March, Kempf said.

“They had a timeframe involved in when they wanted to do that, quite frankly,” Kempf said. “That was the deciding line on why the chamber went with an alternative-themed festival as opposed to pickle fest.”

The idea for the Vlasic Community Fest can be traced to a conversation Kempf said he had with a member of the Imlay City Chamber of Commerce board who works in the human resources department at Vlasic.

“She was the original person that I spoke to and I said ‘Hey you know what I’ve been thinking is maybe we can do something down at the fairgrounds’ and she said, ‘You know it’s funny you say that because my boss approached me a few days ago and said we need to figure out something to do for the employees because we need to recognize their efforts,’” Kempf said. “So that’s kind of how it fell together.”

Kempf said anyone interested in the final schedule should watch easternmichiganstatefair.com for details in coming days.