

Just a bunch of small town hoopla

The Yellow Springs Street Fair brings food, fun and families together

By Chelsea Davis

***“When your job is to look at vendors all the time, it’s awesome when a vendor really catches your eye and she’s from Dayton.”***

This year’s biannual Yellow Spring Street Fair is held on June 14, with events beginning at 9 a.m. and going until 7 p.m.

“It’s a just a day of small town hoopla,” Holly Simpson, the marketing and events coordinator for the Yellow Springs Chamber of Commerce, said.

Simpson originally caught wind of the Street Fair when she worked for Dino’s Cappuccinos on Xenia Avenue, and went through a few fair’s with them. She is now finishing up her eighth or ninth Street Fair with the Chamber of Commerce, and counts her experience with Dino’s as a helpful insight into the event.

“My work at Dino’s helped to show me the importance of the street fair to local business,” Simpson said. “Then from a marketing point of view it’s really good to say, ‘Hey we’re here, we’re Yellow Springs.’”

While no one can pinpoint an exact date, the Yellow Spring Street Fair is believed to have begun in the seventies as a simple sidewalk sale, and has now become a full-fledged operation, with it really coming into its own in the past four years.

“That’s the 10 million dollar question ...,” Simpson said. “It started sometime in the seventies as a sidewalk fair or sale, but nobody has been able to give me an exact date, it’s like trying to name [the street fair] attendance. I just don’t know.”

The Street Fair as it’s now known was designed as a way for local merchants to market their stores and products, while giving patrons a fun and relaxed environment to enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of Yellow Springs.

These days the street fair is home to a myriad of vendors, of both the Yellow Springs variety and out-of-towners.

“We have, I would say, maybe a 60-40 split,” Simpson said. “60 percent are Yellow Springs merchants and the rest are from out of town.”

Most of these out-of-town merchants still hail from the tri-state area, however due the overwhelming success in the past few years, Simpson said people are coming from all over.

“We have a couple of Chicago vendors, also Indian, Pennsylvania and one from Georgia this year,” Simpson said. “It’s raw that we get these vendors, especially out of state. We can continue to bring back old favorites but also continue to bring in new people.”

For a small town whose biggest claim-to-fame is being the residence of comedian Dave Chappelle, they’ve built a strong reputation for quality, diverse products, the number of merchant applications has far exceeded expectations, and the YS Street Fair team has had to be much more selective.

“You kind of have to be handmade ... We try to stay pretty eclectic,” Simpson said. “We have all different kinds of art, from painting to ceramics and jewelry, and a guy who cuts up license plates to make signs.”

We try to stay pretty eclectic. We have all different kinds of art, from painting to ceramics and jewelry

In order to accommodate the growing numbers, Simpson and her team expanded the street fair footprint and made efforts to “de-crowd” areas.

“Now [the street fair] has a much larger footprint. We take over Xenia Avenue, Short Street, Walnut and Corey, and last fall we finally added Dayton,” Simpson said. “We tried to make it a cohesive footprint ... so on Dayton we have the music festival and biergarten.”

The aisles on Xenia Avenue have been widened to make it easier for people to traverse and therefore enjoy themselves more, and not feel “like they’re being herded down the street,” as Simpson put it.

The Yellow Springs Street Fair not only attracts merchants, but food vendors and non-profit organizations. According to Simpson Yellow Spring has “a ton” of non-profits and roughly 75-percent participate in the street fair.

“Of course this is great for our merchants, but it’s a great venue for non-profits, both in Yellow Springs and outside of Yellow Springs,” Simpson said. “It’s a great place for non-profits to get out and talk about their platform and engage with the community.”

Just like with her vendors, Simpson is picky when it comes to the food showcased at the Street Fair. This year they have between 35 and 40 food vendors.

“I’m always looking for something different,” Simpson said. “We do a lot of international: Indian, Asian, Argentinian, and Greek. All kinds of stuff ... then all of the other things you’d expect to see at a festival: ice cream, French fries, that kind of stuff.”

The fair will also feature some local food trucks, including Voodoo Taco a food truck that’s been around since late 2013, and Ohio Farm Direct, a truck that receives its supply directly from their farm.

The Yellow Springs Street Fair is not just for grown-ups merchants and their grown-up patrons, it is actually praised for being extremely family friendly.

“We get a lot of families, even in the biergarten and music festivals. The families come and the kids are just dancing away. It’s adorable,” Simpson said. “It’s a family geared event, with pottery painting stations and a place to get henna tattoos. There’s even an Alpaca farm from New Richmond and they bring baby Alpacas for the kids to pet.”

In addition to the street fair, which runs from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., there are also the various musical acts and a biergarten on Dayton Avenue. There are two stages that have bands throughout the day from 12 p.m. until 7 p.m. As well as buskers, like belly dancers, walking around the street performing.

“The other focus is on music and entertainment,” Simpson said. “There’s a south end acoustic stage, and we have a belly dancing troupe. We’ll also have the Yellow Springs Brewery in the biergarten, as well as other craft beers throughout.”

A few added features to this year’s fair is the new free bike valet service, provided by Bike Miami Valley, a Dayton non-profit organization advocating for safe bicycling in the Miami Valley, as well as the shuttle service.

“We’re always trying to improve traffic and how to get here,” Simpson said. “We’ve added busses and Bike Miami Valley will do a free bike valet. They’ll be there talking about their cause

and there will be things for sale. It's totally in-line with what Yellow Springs is about, and we're on the bike path."

The shuttle service will run from Yellow Springs High School to the fair. The bike valet is free, providing you have a valid ID.

There are many interesting and new things to see at this year's Street Fair, including a Dayton woman who produces a cosmic themed line called, "Comet Vomit." She makes her nail polishes, makeup, jewelry and accessories. Simpson mentioned that she's been following this vendor and is excited to have her.

"It's cool to see her come and pull this brand together. I love watching that," Simpson said.

"When your job is to look at vendors all the time, it's awesome when a vendor really catches your eye *and* she's from Dayton."

While there is a ton to do and see at the Street Fair, the one thing you won't see is pets, unless needed for health reasons. But you will surely see just about everything else there.

"We don't allow pets at the street fair. It's a point of contention always, but it's absolutely too crowded for dogs, and it's a safety issue," Simpson said. "I will say, I don't think you could come to the street fair twice and have the same experience."

*The Yellow Springs Street Fair is June 14 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., on Xenia Avenue, Short Street, Walnut Street, and Corry Street, and then music, entertainment and the biergarten are on Dayton Street from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. For more information on the Yellow Springs Street Fair please visit the Yellow Springs website at <http://www.yellowspringsohio.org/> or the Fair's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/YellowSpringsOH>.*