

Beating the Cold

Islanders, Visitors Enjoy 31st Annual Winter Festival Despite Cold Temperatures

By Ryan Schlehuder

Residents and visitors overcame temperatures nearing zero degrees to enjoy the annual two-day Winter Festival on Mackinac Island Saturday, February 3, and Sunday, February 4.

Winter Festival, in its 31st year, is sponsored by Mackinac Island Recreational Development (MIRD), a 29-year-old, non-profit organization that raises money for recreation facilities.

Saturday's events included many outdoor games for adults and children at Great Turtle Park. A new game this year included the turtle race, where a roll of the colored dice determines how far a contestant's turtle advances on the race grid. The wooden turtles were created by wood shop students at school.

Another new game children enjoyed was geo-caching, a trendy treasure-hunting sport where participants use global positioning system (GPS) devices to locate hidden prizes around the park. GPS technology uses a satellite grid to locate a point on land.

"That is a new game we tried that I believe will become bigger in future Winter Festivals," said Nikki Gugin, MIRD's president. "Meg and Jeff Ferguson put that together and the kids really liked it."

Participants also enjoyed competing in an obstacle course, broomball, chicken chuck (bowling with a frozen chicken), and closest-to-the-pin snow golfing. The younger children also enjoyed an egg hunt in the snow. That evening, a sock hop was held in Johnson Hall at Mission Point Resort.

Broomball was played in the flooded horse ring, where members of the Mackinac Island Fire Department made an ice rink.

"It is a great skating rink, and we hope to be able to use it for the rest of the winter," said MIRD member Barb Fisher.

People at the park were warmed by a bonfire, which many used to make s'mores, a popular camping treat that includes melted marshmallows and a stick of chocolate between two pieces of graham crackers. They were also treated to hot beverages and to grilled hot dogs and brats.

The park's pavilion was also a refuge from the cold, as Larry Rickley Sr. and Larry Rickley Jr. volunteered their time, covering the pavilion with plastic and installing a portable heater inside.

"Saturday was really cold, so having that pavilion enclosed and heated was very appreciated," said MIRD member Brenda Bunker. "They did a wonderful job."

Sunday's events were more climate-friendly as the festival was held indoors at Mackinac Island Public School.

Participants enjoyed a breakfast and lunch prepared by volunteers and MIRD members. Also on hand were several games for children and bingo, a popular festival game enjoyed by people of all ages. A silent auction of various items was also held.

Island volunteer Sylvia Perault was named the city Recreation Department's Volunteer of the Year and was given the honor of being this year's Winter Festival Snow Queen. She received a plaque with her name on it and a bouquet of flowers from Island Mayor Margaret Doud.

Twenty-year-old Donald "Jamie" Andress also entertained the crowd with his magic tricks, a hobby he picked up in August while working at Doc's House of Magic.

One of the more popular festival events each year is the photograph contest for MIRD's annual calendar, Seasons of Mackinac. This year's contest, for the 2009 calendar, had a record 289 photographs submitted, said MIRD member Leanne Brodeur. The previous record was 222, set in 2002.

Fifty-two people from Mackinac Island and 11 states submitted photographs.

Festival celebrants voted for their favorite photographs for each season in the year. Fall and summer, as usual, had the most photographs.

Winners of the contest will be announced in a few weeks, said Ms. Brodeur.

Perhaps the only adjustment needed during Sunday's events was holding the volleyball games indoors instead of outdoors. In an attempt to keep with tradition, however, players were required to wear their winter gloves.

Winter Festival usually raises about \$6,500 each year, said Ms. Bunker, which is used to improve Mackinac Island's recreation facilities.

Mrs. Fisher said MIRD's top priorities are researching the idea to provide day care for Island parents and make landscape improvements to Great Turtle Park, including restoring the park's concession stand.

Overall, said Mrs. Gugin, it was another successful year for Winter Festival.

"It's a great time for everyone because it draws everyone together," she said. "It's a chance for people to get out of their winter hibernation, and it helps cure mid-winter blues."



Teenagers and adults made use of the ice rink at Great Turtle Park for broomball, which is played much like hockey but uses brooms and boots. The skating rink was created by the Mackinac Island Fire Department.



Mission Point Resort's moose mascot (Island resident Kyle Sweet) tries his hand in the festival's snow golf chipping contest, where participants chip a golf ball as close to the flagged target as possible.



One-year-old Macade Ferguson finds his own Winter Festival fun, riding a horse on a spring at Great Turtle Park.



Larry Rickley Sr. and Larry Rickley Jr. provided an escape from the cold temperatures, wrapping the pavilion at Great Turtle Park with plastic and installing a portable heater inside. Participants were able to sit and enjoy hot dogs and brats in warmth and comfort.