

NOBODY OVERLOOKS A CUSTOM WORTH COMMEMORATING

Festive Frame of



Courtesy City of La Crosse

BY KRISTY ALPERT

WISCONSIN'S GREAT RIVER FOLK FESTIVAL FEATURES TALENTED REGIONAL MUSICIANS.

Although there's an obvious allure for sampling fried butter or soaring above barns full of livestock on roller coasters and Ferris wheels at the nearby state or county fair, there's something special even the biggest festivals around can't muster up: simple small-town charm.

Small-town festivals are a great way to experience quiet community destinations in America's Heartland. During those events, residents take to the streets with arms wide open to welcome crowds and offer outsiders a chance to party like locals. Typically run by volunteers and put on with loads of town spirit and pride, the festivals invite visitors to come and soak in the quirks and charms of small-town celebrations.

MENDOTA SWEET CORN FESTIVAL

Mendota, Illinois

Located in northern Illinois, Mendota is a city that not only stakes its claim as “the World’s Greatest Little City,” but also plays host to the one and only Mendota Sweet Corn Festival. The festival began as a one-day street fair 65 years ago and has now grown to a full-fledged three-and-a-half-day event with more than 60,000 attendees.

Each year, the festival takes place during the second full weekend in August and features a carnival, a parade, a craft show, a flea market, food booths and tons of corn — 50 tons of corn, to be exact.

“My favorite event is the free corn serving on Sunday,” said Alison Wasmer, executive director of the Mendota Area Chamber of Commerce. “That’s really what the festival is all about: many volunteers welcoming people to our town.”

Aside from the great atmosphere, festive beer gardens and live music, many agree with Wasmer that their favorite event is watching the team of volunteers cook a giant batch of Del Monte sweet corn in an oversized vintage steam engine.

WWW.SWEETCORNFESTIVAL.COM



Courtesy Mendota Area C.O.C.

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LEGENDS AND LOGGING DAYS

Park Rapids, Minnesota

For more than 35 years, the people of Park Rapids, Minnesota, have been celebrating the second weekend in August by releasing their inner lumberjacks — and “lumberjills” — with their annual Legends and Logging Days festival. The festival began in honor of the rich heritage of logging in the Park Rapids region of the country and has become one of the mainstays on the town’s annual calendar.

From chainsaw sculpting and kickboxing demonstrations to live music and a chili and hot-wings cook-off, there is something for everyone in the group to see, taste, discover and enjoy at the festival. Along with a farmers market and tons of food vendors — try the buffalo burgers — the main event at the festival is a wood-chopping and -sawing contest that puts world champion and world-record-breaking lumberjacks to the test.

“We have added many demonstrations of historic crafts and activities, such as black powder encampments, Black Swan Cooperage making oak whiskey barrels on-site, dutch-oven cooking, historic book binding and much more,” said Katie Magozzi, executive director of the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Office.

WWW.PARKRAPIDS.COM/EVENTS/LEGENDSLOGGINGFESTIVAL.HTM

HOMESTEAD DAYS FESTIVAL

Nathan Boone Homestead State Historic Site
Ash Grove, Missouri

The Nathan Boone Homestead Days Festival got its start years ago as the Nathan Boone Rendezvous. Originally staged by the Ash Grove community and the Nathan Boone Rendezvous committee, the festival quickly gained a huge following and has become one of the largest events in the Ash Grove area each year.

The festival runs Oct. 20-21 this year and features living-history encampments, craft demonstrations, children’s games, music, food, storytelling and much more. Many of the festivities center around the life and career of Nathan Boone and the role his family played in the westward expansion of the United States.

“Groups can enjoy the tours of the Boone home, the music and a walk through natural settings of the Nathan Boone Homestead,” added David Roggenses, natural resource manager for the Nathan Boone Homestead Days Festival in Ash Grove. “They can expect to learn history in a beautiful and happy setting.”

WWW.MOSTATEPARKS.COM/EVENT/59296/HOMESTEAD-DAYS-FESTIVAL

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Courtesy Park Rapids C.O.C.

MINNESOTA'S LEGENDS AND LOGGING DAYS FEATURES CHAINSAW SCULPTING DEMONSTRATIONS.

MAIN STREET PORT CLINTON WALLEYE FESTIVAL

Port Clinton, Ohio

Each year the people of Port Clinton, Ohio, host the annual Main Street Port Clinton Walleye Festival. The 33rd annual festival will take place May 23-27, 2013, and celebrates all things local on the shores of beautiful Lake Erie at Waterworks Park in Port Clinton.

"My favorite activity at the Walleye Festival is the kids' fishing derby because it encourages children to participate in the outdoors and spend time with their family," said Laura Schlachter, program manager of Main Street Port Clinton. "Back by popular demand this year is the lighted boat parade and the craft-beer tasting, making for the perfect summer kick-off."

An array of free live concerts starts the day before children can begin participating in the fishing derby. More than 130 vendors from around the nation set up shop for festivalgoers amidst a sea of carnival rides, educational programs and activities, and a grand parade.

WWW.WALLEYEFESTIVAL.COM

GREAT RIVER FOLK FESTIVAL

La Crosse, Wisconsin

Recently celebrating its 37th year, the Great River Folk Festival is a delight to the town of La Crosse, Wisconsin, and beyond.

"The Great River Folk Festival is a wonderful day, evening and weekend full of music and fun," said Karen Houlihan, administrator for the city of La Crosse. "Even the food vendors are carefully chosen and offer really good ethnic food," she said.

The 2012 festival ran from Aug. 24-26 and featured an expansive lineup of talented musicians and bands. A mecca for the musically inclined, as well as those not so inclined who just enjoy good tunes in a great atmosphere, the yearly festival includes a songwriters contest, craft sales and demonstrations, music workshops, ethnic dancing and children's music.

WWW.GREATRIVERFOLKFEST.ORG

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