

# Absent at Arbor Day

*Celebration is fruitful despite low attendance*

BY ADAM KLINKER  
Staff Reporter

NEBRASKA CITY — The trees were blossoming, even though the crowds weren't.

The big draws surrounding Nebraska City and its 126th Arbor Day Celebration this weekend may have succumbed to another popular Nebraska pastime — the Red-White spring football game in Lincoln.

Attendance remained steady throughout much of Saturday afternoon, and participants talked about the lull in the attendance compared to past Arbor Day celebrations.

With the sun shining, a high temperature of 78 degrees and an expected storm system that never came, the day was pleasant for those who came.

"I'm so pleased with this weather," said Robert Smith of Lincoln. "It's just a fantastic day."

Smith works in the membership services department at the National Arbor Day Foundation Lincoln office.

Still, the question of where everybody was continued to concern some Arbor Day enthusiasts.

After all, the national holiday did begin in Nebraska City when J. Sterling Morton, then editor of the Nebraska City News, decided a healthy ecosystem of trees could serve as windbreaks to reduce soil erosion, provide wildlife habitat and beautify the parched plains.

More than 1 million trees were planted on the first Arbor Day in 1872.

"This is a slowdown from previous years," said Joe Rico, commander of the Nebraska City American Legion, of this year's low attendance. "It's hard to say if this trend will continue. We hope it doesn't."

Rico said low parade attendance could be attributed to factors including the Arbor Day Farm craft show and the Huskers' scrimmage.

Rico also said there were fewer school marching bands in the parade this year, another possible factor in the low attendance. Only one band, the Nebraska City Middle School band, played at the parade.

Students from local elementary schools also marched in the parade.

"It was kind of embarrassing," said Nebraska City fifth-grader Kara Schaulis, clad in an evergreen tree costume.

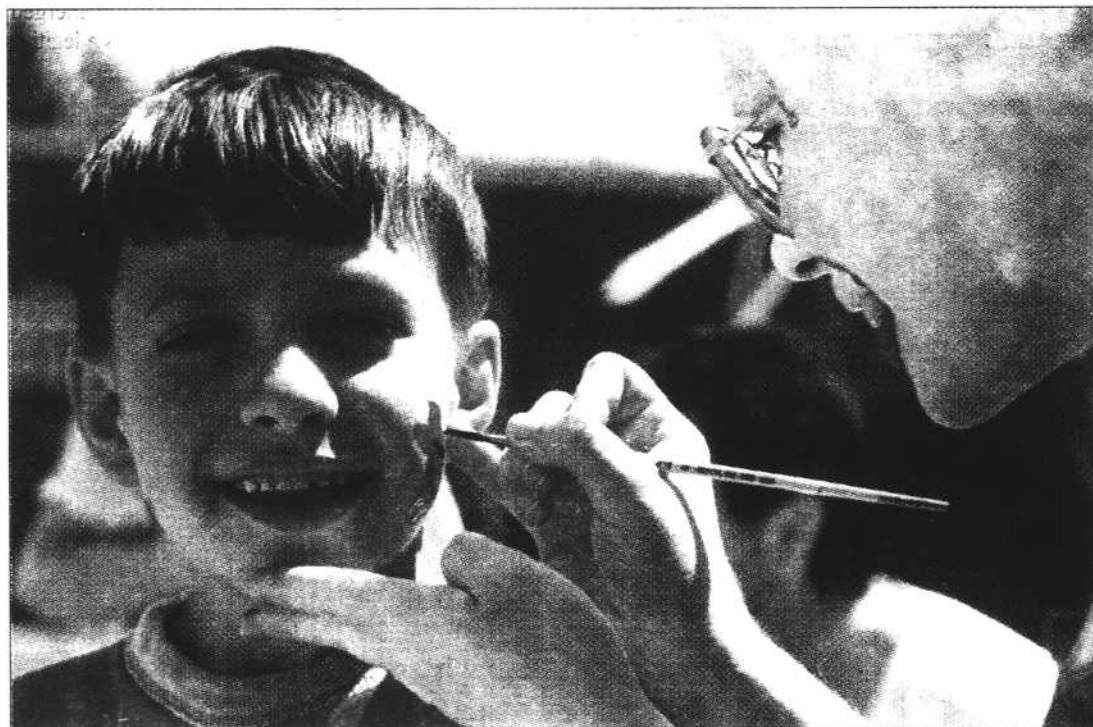
Her classmate Samantha Smulling agreed the costumes were daunting.

"It's really hot (in the costume)," Smulling said, "but it was fun."

Rico said the parade was a success even though only one band marched.

"It was still a really great (parade)," Rico said.

Rico rode at the front of the parade with Art Sackles, the commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Nebraska City. Sackles also was running a popcorn stand on the route. Sackles had a different idea



on the low parade turnout.

"There are too many politicians," Sackles said. "People don't like to watch politicians. They want to watch the school bands."

Groups representing Republican gubernatorial candidates John Breslow and Mike Johanns were among the 87 entries in the parade. Rep. Jon Christensen, Secretary of State Scott Moore and lieutenant governor candidate Dave Maurstad also made personal appearances.

### Still a success

Despite low attendance, Nebraska City residents and Arbor Day enthusiasts said the day was fruitful.

Nebraska City Mayor Tim Hall said Arbor Day was an excellent example of how people in his community pull together.

"(Arbor Day) really exemplifies what Nebraska City is and how everyone works together," Hall said. "With Arbor Day and Applejack in the fall, it seems to happen flawless every time."

Noting that same sense of community, volunteers from Nebraska City High School helped with many of the activities around Arbor Day Farm. Downtown shopkeepers posted drawings by area elementary school children in their windows.

Susie Wirth of Nebraska City, the educational coordinator for the National Arbor Day Foundation, said she was very pleased with everyone's work.

At Arbor Day Farm, the center of pre-parade action, volunteers' hard work allowed visiting arborist groups, including one from Tulsa, Okla., to tour the ground and eat fresh apple pie from the farm's pie garden.

The group, Up With Trees, said the day was an interesting look at how the foundation was promoting tree replanting after last year's October snowstorm.

Traveling by bus with 30 members, the group planted 105 trees Saturday around Omaha.

"We had read about the bad storm in October and thought, 'Why don't

we come up?'" So here we are," said Jim Costas, an Up With Trees member. "We're having a wonderful time."

"And this pie is delicious," said Joe Thompson, another group member.

Among other things to explore at Arbor Day Farm were tree-climbing demonstrations, environmental education games for children and the snack bar, full of apple cider, pie and other delectable goodies.

Free cedar tree seedlings were available as a means of promoting replanting and regrowth after the October storm.

"You hear a lot about Arbor Day, but you don't know anything until you go," said Bellevue resident Deb Bahr.

The Bahrs and their two children have recently moved to Nebraska from their home in Yellowstone National Park.

"It's not Yellowstone," Deb Bahr said, "but you've got a lot of different trees here in Nebraska."

"We love it here."

KELLIE D. BOTTRELL/DN  
**TOP: BROTHERS ANDREW JEANNERET, 5, and Adam Jeanneret, 8, spin a mosaic stained-glass ball from Whimsical Expressions during the Arbor Day Celebration Saturday afternoon in Nebraska City. Whimsical Expressions, owned by Kim and Bryan Peters of Milligan, set up one of the many craft booths at the festival.**

DAWN DIETRICH/DN  
**BOTTOM LEFT: BRANDON ELL, 6, of Lincoln, gets his face painted by Sunshine the clown at the celebration. The festival was the 126th annual Arbor Day Celebration.**

DAWN DIETRICH/DN  
**BOTTOM RIGHT: RUSSELL LINCOLN of Kirksville, Mo., makes kettle korn at the celebration. Old Tyme Kettle Korn is owned and run by Lincoln and his family.**