



The APPLE CORPS

Story by
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&
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

HALEY HABEGGER, 4, of Pawnee City, competes in the apple-bobbing contest during the Applejack Festival on Saturday in Nebraska City. This year marked the 30th anniversary of the festival.

BRENT DENNISTON TASTES one of the entries in the apple pie contest Saturday during the Applejack Festival. Judges for the contest also were competing for the title of Mr. Applejack.

BECKY PAUL, 7, of Bellevue, eyes her prize while competing in the apple-bobbing contest Saturday at Nuckoll's Square Park. The contest was one of many offered in the apple-lympics.

Nebraska City festival quadruples town's size

Some may go cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, but for 30 years, apple lovers have been going to Nebraska City for applejack.

The Applejack Festival, that is. The town of 6,500, along with several thousand visitors, celebrated the festival's 30th anniversary with attractions including a parade, children's activities and tours of the town's three surrounding apple orchards.

Festival organizers didn't overplay the anniversary, said Paula Darling, Nebraska City tourism director, but not because of a lack of effort.

"It can't get much bigger," she said.

And with a parade including 30 bands, the annual Apple Bowl football game between Peru State University

and Dana College and a weekend boom quadrupling Nebraska City's population, it's hard to argue.

"We expect about 30,000 people this weekend," Darling said. Other estimates were as high as 40,000.

Many of these people come to see their kids play in the marching bands, which come from as far away as York to the west and Missouri and Iowa to the east, Darling said, and at least one couple had come from as far away as New York.

Following the parade, the Applejam Fest entertained crowds with live music, the crowning of Little Miss Applejack and several competitions, including apple-bobbing, apple-coring and seed-spitting.

Visitors not only crowded the

streets of Nebraska City, they also flocked outside the city to see the real stars of the festival — the famous Missouri Valley apples — go through quality checks and cider presses.

West of the city at Arbor Lodge, Susan Wirth, education coordinator for the National Arbor Day Foundation, which owns the orchard, explained to visitors how hundreds of thousands of apples are sorted for different uses as they bounce along a long conveyor line with chutes, belts and deflectors.

The apples run on a chain-link belt that separates the small ones from the large ones. If an apple is too small and falls through one of the holes in the belt, it goes to the cider press. The large apples are sent downstream, where workers inspect them.

If an apple is misshapen or has a bruise, it's sent to be made into pie or applesauce. If it's badly broken or squashed, it's sent to the press. The apples that make the cut are packed carefully into paper bags to be sent to stores.

Outside, Ferd and Delores Lintel sold their homemade apple butter, just as they had at the Applejack Festival

for the past several years. The Lintels live in Lincoln and make 41 different kinds of jams and jellies for their company, Grama's Inc. While Dolores sold the finished product, Ferd stirred a vat of unfinished butter over an open fire. The process of making the butter takes about four hours, Ferd said.

"You peel, core and grind (the apples), add sugar and spices and cook the h-e-l-l out of 'em," he said.

Although apples were in abundance in Nebraska City, the festival's namesake — applejack — was nowhere to be found. Webster's New World Dictionary defines applejack as a brandy distilled from fermented cider, but all of the cider appeared to be of the non-alcoholic variety.

So why call it the Applejack Festival instead of simply the apple festival?

Ask Jack.

In 1968, Jack Brawner, owner of Brawner Furniture in Nebraska City, was talking with then-chamber manager for the Chamber of Commerce, Ron Ballou, about ways of attracting visitors of the surrounding orchards into the city.

Their idea was a fall festival — now

all they needed was a theme.

Finally, Ballou turned to Brawner and said, "We need a festival centered around apples, Jack." Apples, Jack, became Applejack, and the rest is history.

Brawner, who hopes to retire soon, said he has not been involved with the festival for 13 years, but he said he takes pride in the celebration that bears his name.

"I'm thrilled about it," he said, "to see how much it's grown."

Many of the weekend visitors to Nebraska City also seemed thrilled.

Craig and Karen Collins, of Omaha, said they were impressed with their first visit to the festival. Their friend, Don Hendricksen, also of Omaha, described Karen as somewhat of an apple connoisseur — just last week they had visited Martin Apple Orchard in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The couple came to Nebraska City to sample products for Karen's apple pies and apple crisps, but Craig, who is from West Point, said they found much more.

"Living in a larger town, it's nice to come back to a town like this," he said. "It brings back fond memories."

3ON3 BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

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