

## **New Kermis committee busy working to improve festival**

By Brian Roebke Editor

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Anyone who's gone to the Kermis Festival in Little Chute over the years has noticed the change.

Enthusiasm for the once popular two-day festival has diminished so much that it hit rock bottom in 2007.

The festival was cut back to one day, and after attendance at the event was a disappointment, the Village of Little Chute made the decision to pull out of the festival. In the past, the village had organized and managed the festival, and the village decided the payback was more than the investment.

As a result, there will be major changes for the event in 2008, as the festival will be a one-day event again this year, and will be moved to Saturday, Oct. 11. Kermis will begin in the morning and conclude around the dinner hour, and be held in downtown Little Chute.

The grassy area next to the Windmill office will be the focal point of the celebration.

Little Chute Windmill, Inc. Executive Director Robin Dekker is leading the committee as chairperson. A new committee has been formed and they are currently meeting to discuss the format of this year's festival.

Dekker said at this time they are not trying to limit the size of the committee.

"What we want is people to get involved," she said. "If anyone has ideas, suggestions, directions that they think the festival should go in, then they're more than welcome to either share that with the committee or become a member of the committee," Dekker said. "If they want to do it, they need to do it now because decisions are being made."

The committee is currently meeting twice a week because there is so much to do, since the village turned over the reins about a month ago.

The two big changes are the location of the festival and moving the date later in the fall so the schools could be more involved. "Everybody kept saying, we have to get the kids involved again and I wish it was downtown again," Dekker said. "Traditionally, it's a harvest time festival, so we are moving it closer to the harvest time."

During the day there will be family activities, street sweeping, vendors, Dutch food, Dutch dancers, and Dutch music in the downtown area decorated in a fall harvest theme. At night, they hope to make it adult friendly.

The committee hopes to get local restaurants and bars involved in the evening hours by having bands and different things going on for a nightlife portion of the festival.

Dekker hopes St. John Parish will have its fish boil on Friday night, but that hasn't been determined yet.

"We're just trying to get as many groups involved," Dekker said. "The biggest thing is that the Windmill Committee is organizing it, but just as before, it isn't just one group or two groups that should be making this happen, it should be the whole village and everyone should be benefiting from it."

The village will still be involved, but in a limited way, with things such as traffic control, law enforcement, refuse clean-up, and supportive services. The financial commitment, however, will be greatly reduced. There are several village staff members on the committee, however.

"We have local business owners, teachers from the elementary school, a teacher and Dale VandeHey from St. John Parish, Windmill committee members, a really big variety of people," Dekker said.

There is a big push to get the businesses involved again as well.

A parade could happen in the future, but not this year, since there is so much to do.

"People really want to see the parade come back and we really want to make it happen," Dekker said.

One of the big parts of the parade was the street sweeping, and they plan to bring the sweeping back this year as part of the festival. One idea was to have Dutch dancing at the top of every hour, and street sweeping could be a part of that.

Dekker said the committee is trying to make the festival more ethnic than it had been in the past few years.

"One of our main goals is to make it Dutch again," Dekker said. "The point of it is to make it a Dutch ethnic festival and make it as traditional like it used to be."

Sieg the Wooden Shoe Carver will return after missing last year's festival because of health issues. Debbie Daanen Photography will return with the Dutch dress-up photos, and they are trying to get one or two of the polka bands from last year to return. A band from Neenah with a Dutch repertoire of music is also a possibility.

There will also be Belgian draft horses pulling a wagon, giving people free rides throughout Little Chute during the day. Also, Scott Kelnhofer from Hortonville has offered his Friesian stallion Dutch horse for the day. "This horse is amazing," Dekker said. "This one horse is used to children and used to going to different events. He's just the most beautiful horse you've ever seen."

A Dutch pancake breakfast is planned for the village hall and the civic center will be a backup plan in case of rain. The committee is trying to get as much Dutch food as possible.

The extent of St. John's involvement has yet to be determined. "From my point of view and the view of the committee, we want St. John to be as involved as possible," Dekker said. "And maybe even more so because of the history of the festival has always involved the church. It's important to me and it's important to the committee that they participate."

The Little Chute Fire Department would participate in Kermis, and may hold its open house on that day.

A Kermis King and Queen contest is another idea that's been thrown out, all in the hopes that the festival can show off Little Chute's heritage.

"That is what makes people interested in coming. Little Chute needs to start capitalizing on that," Dekker said. "In the future the windmill is definitely going to be central to these activities."

There is still time to be of assistance to the committee by contacting Dekker at 788-2629 or [yourwindmill@sbcglobal.net](mailto:yourwindmill@sbcglobal.net).