

Field Day fryin'

Plenty of fish, chicken and fun in Clarksburg

By JILL ZIGGER
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CLARKSBURG — It's been described as just a fish fry in a field. But it draws 3,000 people to what is known as Clarksburg's homecoming.

What is it? Thursday's Clarksburg Methodist Church 75th Field Day, a day when approximately 600 pounds of fish and 200 pounds of chicken will be fried. And when they aren't eating, visitors' jaws will be dropping.

Not only do people from Florida and Nevada visit, some plan vacations and reunions around the gathering in the 11-acre field, 1.4-mile east of Clarksburg.

Although the town sports a population of 500 and the church has an average attendance of 40 — kids included — the 1989 Field Day drew a reported 5,000.

Dennis Kern, 52, has been with the church all her life. She is a typical church member in that she has several duties on Field Day. And even more typical, she can't remember ever missing a Field Day.

Also

This is the schedule for Thursday's 75th Clarksburg Field Day:

All day — Trap shooting, horseshoe pitching, flea markets

1-2 p.m. — Adelphi Band

2:30-3:30 p.m. — Adena Twirlers

3:30-4:30 p.m. — Adena H.S. Band

4:30 p.m. — begin serving chicken and fish dinners

5:30-8:30 p.m. — Adelphi Band

6:30-8 p.m. — Harmony 4

8:30-11 p.m. — Willow Creek



Willard Wood, 70, has been enjoying and working on the Clarksburg Field Day for over 35 years.

remember ever missing a Field Day.

When I was a kid couldn't sleep the night before," Kern says. "It was the highlight of the summer."

There were always two new outfits we had for Field Day. We used to die because we had to go home for an hour, take a

bath and change because our clothes were filthy. We were afraid we might miss something."

Today, her 8-year-old son, Jeff, counts the days to Field Day.

Kern's duties include assembling the antique and memorabilia display. More recent additions are the flea markets, dunking booths and pig-pig golf.

Francis McColister, 90, remembers the first Field Day in 1915 which was to raise money to build a basement under a church.

"The men had a fish fry and did everything," McColister says. "The women didn't like that and said they weren't going to let the men do it all."

"Over the years the women decided they wanted half the money for the ladies auxiliary."

Picking the date

The date, the first Thursday of August, was set to draw the farm workers during thrashing and harvesting season when workers were paid extra wages. But why Thursday? Because it's traditional, is the typical answer. Williamsport used to have a Field Day on Thursday but it fell by the wayside.

One woman speculates Monday was wash day, Tuesday was for ironing, Wednesday was reserved for preparation. Following the Thursday event, two days remained, leaving enough time to clean up before Sunday services.

Ask anyone what their favorite Field Day was and they'll probably say it was when they were young and didn't have to work that day.

It's lots of work but "we sweat and we laugh," Kern says.

First, the church-owned field has to be prepared. Friday the fire department hoses the booths out.

James Hiser is one of the workers who prepares the field. He says he fries chickens from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and has missed one Field Day in his 62 years of growing up with the church.

"Tuesday and part of Wednesday we clean out the building and cut the lawn," he says. Wednesday evening the women clean the chicken, cut saw and get the pots and pans ready. Friday we haul everything in which was hauled out Thursday morning."

Virginia Basic says the hardest part is the work before



Nell Hughes, 87, has been to every Field Day.

and after. She attended Field Day until she was 20 in 1933, and returned after 40 years for the past 18 Field Days.

Among other duties, she serves 30 gallons of iced tea.

"You work as long as you can stand up," Basic says.

However, donations and a few extra hands from this and surrounding communities ensures the event is pulled off.

This was the case for the 1981 Field Day. Hiser remembers when on July 12, a storm destroyed 18 Oak trees in the field and many church members were certain the field could not be cleared in time.

"We thought we wouldn't have it ready by Field Day but we had a lot of extra help, even from other communities," Hiser says.

Hiser says years ago radio entertainers came to Field Days, but by the late 1960s they were too expensive to bring.

"People probably came to see people they heard on radio. That's not quite the drawing card now as it was then," he says.

Nell Hughes, 87, does floral arrangements for the table

as well as bread and butter and clearing tables. She's been to them all and attended the first Field Day.

She says she remembers a big downpour in the early 1950s. A photo of the downpour ran in *The Columbus Citizen-Journal*, she says.

Trap-shooting, horseshoe pitching and greased pole climbing are traditional favorites. A steadfast tradition of the day is the Adelphi Band, which has played for more than 50 Field Days. Team sports used to be more important, Hughes says.

"I used to love being the first basemen," she says, recalling her softball days.

Now that sports are part of schools' extracurricular activities, team sports are not really a part of Field Days, McColister says. Basic says she thinks that is because "we're too old to play anymore."

Passing the hat

McColister remembers many years ago a Rev. Cadle came from Indiana to preach. He demanded his fee before he preached and a hat had to be passed three times before enough was raised.

"I don't think he was asked back," he says, laughing.

New to all this is the Rev. Kay Snyder, who came to the church from New Jersey 10 months ago.

"I never heard of Field Days until I came here," she says.

One worry among the older members is there won't be enough younger members willing to put the amount of work into the event to carry on the tradition.

But Hiser disagrees.

"I think there's enough people that will carry it on. I think every year people wonder how we're going to do it but it always seems people are willing to do it."

Kern says her goal is to continue the tradition for 25 more years. To keep it fresh they will keep adding new events but McColister says she doesn't think heavy-metal music will be one of them.

"I think if enough young people know we need help people will volunteer — if nothing else to prove we can do it," Kern says.

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Sat, Mar 23, 2019