

Crab Fest reverberates with safe fun and festivities



LCSO Col. Mike Sheffield, Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum, Marion County Sheriff's Office Capt. Brian Dotten and LCSO Lt. Scott Tummond are seen in the Williston Elementary School Cafeteria during the early part of Saturday evening. Many officers worked well into the night and morning. Sheriff McCallum said he planned to reduce the troops as the night went into the morning and he saw that he was able to relieve the men and women.

**Story And Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © May 1, 2016 @ 11:27 p.m.
All Rights Reserved. Do Not Copy To Facebook Or Anywhere Else**

LEVY COUNTY – The 2016 Williston Crab Fest appears to have provided a lot of fun to thousands of people from Saturday (April 30) into the wee hours of the morning on Sunday.

The past few years of the event have not been marred like one Crab Fest.

The shooting death of Barry Barney, 36, and the pain and suffering experienced by four other people who were wounded by gunshots at the 2013 Williston Crab Fest brought the event a level of notoriety that has since triggered an even stronger law enforcement presence than before.

Devonte Termaine Ocasio, 23, of Reddick was sentenced to 20 years in prison on Sept. 25, 2015 as a consequence of that incident.

On Saturday evening, though, Levy County Sheriff Robert “Bobby” McCallum Jr. felt relatively certain that this would be another year of no deaths or serious injuries from gunshots, stabbings and the like.

There were some arrests, though, because some partygoers failed to abide by the laws of Florida enough to not get caught by the 130 law enforcement officers and personnel from the Levy County Sheriff's Office, Marion County Sheriff's Office, Alachua County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, Williston Police Department and Dunnellon Police Department.

HardisonInk.com



Levy County Commissioner John Meeks holds a goodie bag, which was paid for by various sponsors, including the Levy County Prevention Coalition.

Williston Fire Rescue and the Levy County Department of Public Safety were on standby to respond to calls for help in regard to fire or medical emergencies.

The Levy County Prevention Coalition (LCPC) again provided a source of support for the men and women of law enforcement who protected life and property as they served the resident and visitors at Crab Fest 2016.

LCPC Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Lewis said this group put together goodie bags for police officers that included Famous Amos cookies, salted nuts, M&Ms, Cracker Jacks and the like.

The LCPC also provided a lot of water and Gatorade.

There were 168 hamburgers, 172 sausages and 100 hotdogs made available from the LCPC for the police officers as well. Peach cobbler (industrial size) was created by Lewis' sister Jennifer Munden for the law enforcement officers too.

County Commission Chairman John Meeks was on the scene. He said he has been at the command post for the county each year since he was elected four years ago.

Meeks said he has seen improvements each year, and he is always pleased to see the cooperative spirit demonstrated by surrounding cities and counties.

HardisonInk.com



HardisonInk.com



This set of festival participants welcomed having their picture taken to share with the world via *HardisonInk.com*.

HardisonInk.com

Sheriff McCallum said he waited until about 6 p.m. on Saturday evening to close traffic on Levy County Road 318 between U.S. Alt. 27 to the New Hope Church, because by that time there were so many pedestrians in the area that it was no longer safe to have through traffic on that road.

A little after 6 p.m., an idle-speed tour in a pickup truck along that one-mile stretch showed the sheriff was correct. It was like a river of people walking almost heel-to-toe and shoulder-to-shoulder, all the way across the road and onto the sides of the street.

On occasion people would stop to speak with each other and the tide of bodies would ebb and flow around those who were chatting in the road. There was a long string of vendors on both sides of the road. And people had lawn chairs and other places to sit all along CR 318.

Barbecue and seafood were among the many types of food available.

In a few places, there were huge walls of speakers and music came from them at a sound level that would shake the bones of any person within 50 feet of those speakers. And yet, some people were less than three feet from being directly in front of those powerful sound machines.



HardisonInk.com



The people participating in the Crab Fest all seemed happy, friendly and polite as they sauntered down the road.

There was the odor of burning marijuana along that stretch of road, and people were clearly imbibing alcoholic beverages, however these minor infractions brought no response from law enforcement officers, who seemed to simply maintain the peaceful atmosphere of the Crab Fest.

Among the arrestees who were cleared though the Williston Elementary School Cafeteria, however, included at least one person who was experiencing what it is like to be arrested by a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

That trooper appeared to have reason to charge the man with possessing a felonious amount of marijuana (in excess of 20 grams, slightly less than one ounce).

At least one other arrestee went to jail for violation of probation.

The Williston Crab Fest has grown over the decades.

HardisonInk.com

LCSO Lt. Scott Tummond has been a deputy with the Levy County Sheriff's Office for coming up on 23 years now. He has experienced 20 or 21 of the past Williston Crab Fests. And while they are named "Williston," they are really in the unincorporated area of the county just outside the Williston city limits.

A couple of decades ago, Lt. Tummond said, he remembers the event was relatively small in comparison with the number of partiers in more recent years. It was a small festival in the Lincoln Heights subdivision, he said.

The festival became larger and eventually a deputy was assigned. Then there was an obvious need for more law enforcement officers, he said, and so there was a special detail of 10 to 12 deputies assigned to the Crab Fest.

In the past five years, Lt. Tummond said, the law enforcement community has learned some lessons and modified methods, which now include a set of incident action plans.

By mutual aid agreements between Alachua, Marion and Levy counties, Lt. Tummond said, deputies from all three counties can make arrests in Levy County, and if they need to go to court in Levy County, those officers will be within their rights as sworn law enforcement officers, even though the deputies from Marion and Alachua counties normally lack arrest power in Levy County.

In recent years, the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff McCallum said, has been helping especially by stopping vehicles that are heading to Levy County if they appear to have people demonstrating probable cause to suspect that they are breaking a law.

The FHP and MCSO also have caught drivers heading to Crab Fest. The MCSO and FHP, though, also provided a significant amount of manpower and equipment on the ground in Levy County to assist with law enforcement during the 2016 Crab Fest.



A member of the Florida Highway Patrol and a deputy who was in an unmarked car look inside this silver car with its trunk up. This traffic stop was on U.S. Alt. 27 just east of CR 318.

OTHER ACTIVITY

Other activity in and around Williston on Saturday during daylight hours included:

- * The Williston Community hosting LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' bloodmobile at City Hall; and
- * The Annual Tom Muff Car Show at Holy Family Catholic Church of Williston.