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Watermelon festival covers new ground



This view from the Historic Chiefland Train Depot Park looking across Main Street (U.S. Highway 19) shows one small part of the multitude of tents set up by vendors in the location for the annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival on Saturday (June 2). A new area for parking, in the city-owned grass area just north of this other piece of city property, was utilized by some motorists, and the parking lot and neighborhood at the Train Depot on the east side of U.S. 19 was used for parking as well.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © June 3, 2018 at 5:08 a.m.

CHIEFLAND – The annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival found a new location this year, with scores of vendors planting their tent stakes on the west side of Main Street (U.S. Highway 19).



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(from left) Krystle Skelly, Leah Gamble and Christine Dunn help represent the College of Central Florida at the Watermelon Festival.



Hardy Dean Jr., a member of the First United Methodist Church's congregation, greets visitors at the church's tent. This is a church without walls, and one that welcomes all people to come as they are. The United Methodist Church is known for 'Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.'

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There are four birds in this photo. There were representatives of many non-profit organizations at the event on Saturday, including this one.

The annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival event held the first Saturday of June each year has historically been on East Park Avenue, sometimes in the grass next to the Police Station a little bit, and down a few streets to the south -- however primarily in the Historic Chiefland Train Depot Park on the east side of



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U.S. 19 in years past. Free slices of cold watermelon, once one of the memorable hallmarks of the event, were more easily found in years past than in the 2018 version that happened on June 2 too.

There may have been more vendors this year than in the past. The Watermelon Festival Pageant has evolved over the decades as well, and it happened again this year, as did the Watermelon Festival Parade. There were years when the pageant was held the same weekend as the festival and there were pageants at the Tommy Usher Community Center in years past.

Likewise, in years past, the individuals and groups that put on the festival, the pageant, the parade and the Rotary Club's bicycling event sent press releases to announce the events before they happened.

There was one year where weather shut down the event, and the potential of rain existed this year but it did not stop any activities.

Another relatively new feature for this annual happening in the Chiefland area is the Rotary Club's bicycle ride named the Tour de Melon. It is hosted by the Suwannee Valley Rotary Club, the newer of the two Rotary Clubs in the Chiefland area, where the Chiefland Rotary Club is the historic benchmark for Rotary Clubs in that municipality.

This fundraiser now attracts hundreds of bicyclists who ride various distances after paying an entry fee to help the Rotary Club with its charitable missions.

As occurs during years when there are political races, there were candidates in the mix on Saturday, in the parade as well as on the new festival grounds.

Among the many potential candidates in municipal, county, circuit, state and national races, was Tim West who plans to qualify to run in the Chiefland City Commission race for Seat 4, which is currently occupied by Chiefland City Commissioner Teresa Barron.

West was among the people strolling the new grounds for the Watermelon Festival on Saturday.

"I'm not running against anyone," West said in regard to Barron. "I am running for the city of Chiefland."

The candidate said he considers Chiefland to be a very welcoming city.

"I would like to see Chiefland prosper," West noted on a handout, "while maintaining the values and integrity that make living here so pleasant. Vote for me and together we'll keep Chiefland our favorite place to call home."

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While qualifying time is just around the corner for this city's elections, and for the Levy County races, three candidates who are qualified already for one race were all present at the Chiefland Watermelon Festival. That race is for the one vacant seat to be an Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge.

Julie Waldman, one of three candidates for Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge is seen at her tent on Saturday



In this *HardisonInk.com* archive photo, Bronson Elementary School Principal Michael Homan (left) stands next to Gloria Walker, a candidate for Eighth Judicial Circuit Court Judge as they are at the Bronson Blueberry Festival held in May. Candidate Walker was at the Watermelon Festival as well.

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David Robertson, one of three candidates for Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge, is seen in this photo that was provided upon request. Candidate Robertson was at the Watermelon Festival as were the other two candidates in that race.

One of the three candidates for one seat on the bench as an Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge will be elected on Aug. 28. The Eighth Judicial Circuit includes Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy and Union counties.

As far as circuit court judges' races in this circuit in 2018, Eighth Judicial Circuit Court Judge Stanley "Stan" H. Griffis III, Eighth Judicial Circuit Court Judge Denise R. Ferrero and Eighth Judicial Circuit Court

Judge Susanne Wilson Bullard were all reelected without opposition.

Three candidates are seeking to fill one Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge seat. Those candidates are David Robertson (NOP), Julie Waldman (NOP) and Gloria Walker (NOP).

Those three potential judges were all at the Watermelon Festival, and they all had tents on the new grounds.