

Catsup Bottle Festival celebrates Collinsville landmark

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE – The water tower of the old Brooks Catsup plant in Collinsville has become an iconic landmark for the area over the years.

The tower, which is shaped like and painted to resemble a bottle of the product that was produced at the plant, has dominated the Collinsville skyline for nearly 70 years. Thanks to the efforts of a group of Collinsville residents over the years, what's become known as The Catsup Bottle – which was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 - has become a local tourist attraction and celebrated symbol of Collinsville.

The Bottle and what it represents has become the subject of an annual celebration and festival in Collinsville, the 19th edition of the Catsup Bottle Festival taking place Sunday at Collinsville's Woodland Park; included in the day's activities was the annual Little Princess Tomato and Sir Catsup contests, hot dog and tater-tot eating contests – with the food covered by catsup – appearances by local celebrities, a classic car and motorcycle show sponsored by the Cruzin In Antiques classic car club of Collinsville and many, many more activities throughout the day.

“We have good weather, we have great cars here,” said Judy DeMoisy, one of the chairs of the annual celebration who's become known as “The Catsup Bottle Lady” in

Collinsville. “I think our landmark Catsup Bottle is really known all over the world; we ship souvenirs from the Catsup Bottle, we ship catsup out to every state in the country. We've been doing that for about 20 years.

“I think the festival is a wonderful community event; everybody seems to be very happy, it's very low-key – it's just a great family day. We draw a lot of different ages, and for different reasons – everything from a pageant with the kids in it, kids' games to the parents who come along, the entertainers and of course, all the cars are fabulous. We're glad everyone's here.”

“We're having a great day today,” said co-chair Mike Gassman, known as “The Big Tomato”, of the festival. “It's not too hot but it's been a whole lot of fun. Everyone's been having a great time.

“This is our biggest car show that we've ever had, the most vendors we've ever had and I'm sure this is the biggest crowd we've ever had.”

The festival even attracted international attention with the presence of Mykey O'Halloran, a hair stylist from Melbourne, Australia, who is conducting a tour of the United States as an international fundraiser for the Make A Wish Foundation. “He's a very interesting guy,” Gassman said. “It's really awesome – we're glad to have him here.”

The festival was first held in 1999 to mark the 50th anniversary of the bottle and was held in the parking lot of the Collinsville library; it's grown since then to the point where it's being held in Woodland Park. “We've been going strong ever since. We hope everybody has great community pride in the Catsup Bottle; we really think it's a great thing.

“It's part of the history and heritage of Collinsville; it's such an unusual and unique landmark that you need to celebrate it all you can.”

“We have over 200 cars (today),” said Mike Prosser of the Cruzin in Antiques classic car club, which hosted the classic car show portion of the festival along with the Burnout Alley classic car club. “We have Chevy, Ford, Chrysler, street rods, imports, trucks, Corvettes, Camaros and Mustangs – they're all separate (divisions of the show) – and motorcycles.

“It is a competitive show – we have trophies for each division. We appreciate everyone coming out.”

Joining forces with the festival has made the show a popular part of the day. “We've joined with them together to make this work,” Prosser said. “We have children and with children, they have parents who drive cars; that's what we're here for.”

New this year was a shuttle bus taking visitors to and from the festival grounds from nearby Dorris Intermediate School. For more information on the history of the Catsup Bottle, visit www.catsupbottle.com.



