

34th Annual Olde Alton Craft Fair Off to a Cheery Start

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - The 34th annual Olde Alton Arts and Craft Fair was off to a cheery start on Saturday morning, Dec. 2, 2023. The fair will run through Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023.

Riverbend residents and visitors flooded Alton High School to check out the wares of almost 200 crafters, a few of whom traveled from as far as Texas. The event is

sponsored by the Alton Band and Orchestra Builders (ABOB) and supports both the crafters and the music program at Alton Community Unit School District #11 (ACUSD11).

“We’ve got a good steady flow of customers so far. We hope to have a full day today and tomorrow,” said Dave Fritz, ABOB member and fair organizer. “To see the inventory that’s brought in, just the vast amount of it and the variety of it — it’s amazing to see what these people make and bring in and display and sell at their booth.

All of the crafters’ wares are “at least 51% handmade,” Fritz explained. He added that there are always a lot of Christmas-themed items, and many attendees kick off their holiday shopping this weekend.

The fair is a well-loved tradition for ABOB and attendees, but a few crafters also make sure to come out every year. Tammy and Larry Jones with [TLJ Rocks](#) have been a part of the ABOB craft fair for eight years now. They explained that they’re retired and make jewelry for fun, and they enjoy selling their items at events like this so they can mingle with other crafters.

“After about two years, you kind of get a following,” Larry added. “With different people coming through, you make friends to talk to and stuff like that. We’re retired, so this is just our outlet to go visit friends.”

A few other sellers are new to the ABOB fair but have enjoyed the experience so far. [Patricia Patt](#) and her son traveled from Belleville to sell their work; they explained that crafting is a true passion for both of them and they choose to sell their crafts at fairs so they can afford the supplies to make more.

“We do ceramics and silver work, metal work and stones and have a lot of fun,” Patt said. “It’s nice to be at an event like this because you meet a lot of nice people. They’re very interesting. This is our second year, so I look forward to next year.”

Fritz said the crafters and ACUSD11 music students began setting up for the craft fair on Friday night, and they were there at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday to put the finishing touches on the event. Fritz expressed his gratitude for the students and staff who help with the fair and keep Alton’s music program going strong.

“It’s a great program, something to support,” he added. “We’ve had instructors over the years who have given our students just a great education in music.”

The crafters keep all of their profits, but proceeds from admission costs, food sales and the crafters’ rent all goes to ABOB. This 75-year-old organization supports the

ACUSD11 music program by funding transportation, instruments and uniforms for the students.

Alton High School Head Band Director Blake Korte noted that ABOB helps the music program grow every year. The fair is their main fundraiser. You can learn more about ABOB and how to support them on their [official website at ABOB.net](http://www.abob.net). You can also find a [calendar of upcoming performances](#) by ACUSD11 music students.

“We can’t thank ABOB support enough,” Korte said. “This craft fair is huge for us. It’s our biggest fundraiser of the year so we can provide quality instruction and quality instruments for all the students who wish to be involved in the great program we have.”

Admission to the fair is \$3 on Saturday, Dec. 2 and \$2 on Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023. Kids under 12 are free. The fair runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023, or 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023, at Alton High School.