

“This Town Needs a Good Party!”

By Barbara Glakas

Another Herndon Festival has recently come to an end. Do you know how and why the Herndon Festival first got started?

Flashback to 1980: Jimmy Carter was President, Tom Rust was Mayor of Herndon, and Herndon's population was a little over 13,000.

At that time, the Town had an annual arts and crafts show near the old Town Hall, but a man named Arno Randall wanted more. A Herndon resident, Randall had just been elected as an officer in the Herndon Jaycees, a civic organization that was very active in Town at that time. Trying to think of an activity that would bring local businesses, civic organizations, residents, and shoppers together, he recalled a festival that he had once seen in his travels. This was something that he thought would work in Herndon.

Randall went to see Herndon's Director of Parks and Recreation, Art Anselene (now Herndon's Town Manager), and pitched the idea to him. Anselene mulled over the idea for a few months. He eventually agreed to the idea of trying to merge together the town's arts and crafts show with Randall's festival idea.

At that time, the Parks and Recreation Department had very few staff members. But they, along with the Jaycees, started planning the first festival. As they planned, the initial thought was that they might need about \$3,000 to fund the festival, but as planning went on it became apparent that about \$8,000 to \$12,000 would be needed. The planners arranged for advertising in the local newspaper, the *Herndon Observer*, but up-front money was needed to help get the first festival off the ground.

Randall approached Mayor Rust about the festival idea, asking him if the Town would be willing to sponsor it, with the understanding that the festival would break even and not leave the town in the red. Randall told Rust, “Do you know what this town needs? This town needs a good party!” Rust agreed, and the town became the sponsor.

The first festival was held in 1981 in Town Square. It included a concert, arts and crafts, food, and entertainment. The headline act was a famous bluegrass band called The Country Gentlemen. About 200 volunteers, many from the Jaycees, staffed the festival.

That first festival was conducted on Friday and Saturday and drew about 3,500 people. Within a couple of years it was expanded to include Sunday. Several years later, Thursday evening and the carnival were added.

Over the course of the last 32 years the festival has come a long way. By the year 2000, it was estimated that approximately 85,000 to 95,000 people were attending the festival. A committee consisting of about 20 members plans the event each year, and approximately 800 volunteers help make it a success. Randall, who now lives in Owings Mill, Maryland,

still serves on the executive steering committee, helping to plan and work the festival each year.

Arno, you got your party!