

MONDAY, JULY 30, 2012 GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE WWW.GREATFALLSTribUNE.COM PAGE 3, SECTION A




Red Ants Pants

Continued from 1A

with songs from her new album, "Abbas and Moses," and her classic hits such as "Shut Up and Kiss Me," "The Union and Kisses," and "He Thinks He'll Keep Her."

The Sweetback Sisters, Wyllie and the Wild West and (a) Mahal also entertained crowds on Sunday. Friday and Saturday concertgoers saw performances by Emmaly Harris, Billy Joe Shaver, Wayne, Rodney Crowell, Hayes Carll, Corb Lund, Abigail Washburn, Justin Townes Earle, Jeanne Seely, Ben Hollister and Growing Old Men.

Wyllie Gustafson, lead singer of Wyllie and the Wild West, said he got fortunate to play the festival, which he said he considers one of the best in the state.

"I was really honored to be a part of it this year," he said. "We brought their Montana connection to the show with songs that are born from the lifestyle of Montana. If you're a Montana artist, this is an excellent place to play because of all the quality artists who perform. They're all top notch, every hand on the tick."

Sarah Calhoun is the owner of Red Ants Pants, a White Sulphur Springs women's clothing business. She also is the chief organizer of the festival. She said Sunday the biggest thing she noticed about the crowds is the jovial spirit.

"I haven't found the right word to sum up the festival but someone last year noted how there's a very good will to the event," she said. "That's continued this year and everyone here are good people. We've never had any major issues at all."

Calhoun said at the same time the festival would not happen without the help of the hundreds of volunteers who arrived parking, handed out, manned the information booth and helped with security.

"This whole event is run by the hundreds of incredibly helpful, incredibly generous volunteers and staff of mostly volunteers," she said.

Calhoun said they would have an official count of people who attended later this week but said Sunday they've already seen many more people from the previous year. Last year's crowd was about 5,000.

Bruce Forde, owner of Forde Nursery and co-director of Root Boy Productions of Great Falls, said they've been on board with helping promote the festival since last year because they draw the same types of musicians to the area.

"They play our kind of music," he said. "They play fantastic roots music. Sara does a great job of organizing this festival and we're more than willing to support her with it. I don't think you see anything else like this in Montana."

Forde said after attending last year's inaugural Red Ants Pants Music Festival, he and several other Root Boy members were particularly impressed with the performance from Carrie Rodriguez, so much so that they wanted to get her to play in Great Falls some time in the next year.

"We got in touch with Carrie and she agreed to come play for us this year. She'll be in Great Falls for our Roots Fest, so that's pretty exciting."

While the music was the highlight of the festival, there were several other activities, such as the legging sports demonstrations and competition and a flour-milling demonstration where the flour was milled by people who hold a brock.

Jacob and Courtney Cornett brought the like-powered flour processor to the festival from Conrad. The couple owns Frame Heritage Farm, a diversified, organic farm where they grow organic vegetables, heritage turkeys, ancient and heritage wheat and a variety of seed crops.

They are also the recipient of a Red Ants Pants Foundation grant, which they're using to purchase a large stone mill.

This year's festival also saw new shade tents throughout the grounds, created by a group of volunteers and sponsored by Mountain's Ranch & Home Supply. The shade-tent project was coordinated by Deborah Hannah, a friend of Calhoun's who reached out to her looking for a way to help with the festival.

"Sara's done an amazing job. It's been my pleasure to help and support her," she said.

Hannah also coordinated the lumber skills contests and demonstrations, which included chainsaw and manual saw competitions.

Calhoun said she's had support from many of her friends and family, some of whom have traveled from as far away as Connecticut and New Brunswick, Canada.

"They've all been very supportive from day one," she said.

As for next year, Calhoun said she'll get together with Tom Garney, the person responsible for booking the acts. She said they'll talk about what types of musicians they want to see and what types of music people in White Sulphur Springs and the area would like to see, also.

"I've not always been a big music junkie but I love how music brings people together more than anything else," Calhoun said. "I give Tom my dream list and we get a lot of CDs flying through the door so there's a good blend for people. There's so many great artists you can't write, but someone like Dolly Parton is a long-term dream of mine."

TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY JAKE SORICH

AT LEFT: A huge crowd showed up for a weekend of enjoyment at the Red Ants Pants Music Festival outside White Sulphur Springs.

ABOVE: Mary Chapin Carpenter was a crowd-pleaser as usual.

The Red Ants Pants Festival wasn't just about the music. There was also plenty of fun for the whole family, including bubble blowing and face painting.

Sara Calhoun, festival organizer, above, addresses the crowd. Taj Mahal, above right, also gave a stirring performance for the Red Ants Pants crowd.

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