

OysterFest draws one of its best crowds; event will move next year

By ARLA SHEPHARD
MASON COUNTY LIFE

While it'll take several more weeks before the final numbers come in for how much OysterFest raised this year, event organizers are pleased with the turnout they saw.

The 33rd annual West Coast Oyster Shucking Championship and Washington Seafood Festival, hosted by the Skookum Rotary, brought in more than 13,000 people over two days, Saturday, Oct. 4, and Sunday, Oct. 5, at the Port of Shelton fairgrounds.

"We definitely did better than last year," said Candace Cahill, the event's Grand Old Oyster. "I think the Sunday this year was one of the stronger ones we have had. The wonderful weather and the fact that there was no Seahawks game that day helped us out."

The Skookum Rotary wanted more local families to attend OysterFest this year, and so created Family Day on Sunday, where all children 13 and under got in free.

"That was the other thing that contributed to the increase on Sunday," Cahill said. "We're trying to get the families out there. That 13,000 (figure) doesn't include the kids."

The festival's signature event is the speed and half-shell oyster shucking competitions on Saturday and Sunday.

On Saturday, speed shuckers Mirel Silva, sponsored by Jolly Roger Seafood, Guadalupe Leon and Alejandro Leon placed third, second and first, respectively, with Alejandro Leon taking home the top prize for shucking 24 oysters in 1 minute and 16 seconds.

On Sunday, competitors are judged for not only



PHOTOS BY ARLA SHEPHARD

Raymondo Meza of Jolly Roger Seafood competes in the second heat of the oyster shucking half-shell competition at OysterFest, Sunday, Oct. 5. Meza shelled all of his oysters in 3 minutes and 41 seconds.

their speed, but their precision and the beauty with which they can shuck oysters.

Alejandro Leon took first place again in the half-shell competition, with a time of 2 minutes and 31 seconds. Mario Leon placed second, while Silva again placed third.

Skookum Rotary has secured a new location for OysterFest next year, due to changing restrictions at the Port of Shelton fairgrounds. The new location is on a piece of property north of the current location, on the north runway of Sanderson Field. Instead of buildings, the entirety of OysterFest will take place under tents.

"There's so many questions yet to be answered about how we're going to do this," Cahill said. "You solve one thing and another pops up. It won't be simple."

The site will serve as a temporary location for the next few years as Skookum Rotary and other organizations, such as the



Joel Myer of Mason County Public Utility District No. 3 explains the dangers of downed power lines to a customer at OysterFest.

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