

This article
brought to you by:



WHATEVER COLUMN: Survey says . . .

Rain, rain, stay away so NFF pollsters can poll another day

Richmond Times-Dispatch
Thursday, April 6, 2006

Rain, rain, stay away so NFF pollsters can poll another day Eighty-five percent of the people who attended the 67th annual National Folk Festival in Richmond last October rated their experience as very good, excellent or outstanding.

That's an impressive percentage if you consider that a total of more than 70,000 people attended the festival during its first-year, three-day run on the banks of the James.

It's a little less impressive if you know the National Folk Festival Attendee Satisfaction Survey is based on the responses of fewer than 400 people, or about one-half of 1 percent of attendees, give or take a few.

"It's a small sample," said Katie Boyer, publicity manager for the festival. "So it's not scientific. With 393 responses [and fewer than that in several categories], it's more anecdotal."

The study, conducted by the Richmond-based Southeastern Institute of Research, was originally intended to take place during the festival.

"If the weather had been better, we'd have done the surveys on site," said Boyer. Pollsters were to use handheld computer devices to record the results, then pen and paper. Rain put the kibosh on both plans.

That's why SIR conducted the study after the fact, recently revealing its results.

Boyer sees a silver lining, though . . . even in last year's persistent cloud cover. It was a "learning year."

Given that the weather might have kept some people home, she said, "Maybe it was a little better that it rained. We got an idea of what we can handle."

K Alferio, executive director of citycelebrations, sees the study as a microcosm that will help her organization fine-tune the festival.

"We can learn a lot from what we did last year, and we're taking those lessons to heart," she said. "It's going to be bigger and better than ever!"

SIR, said co-owner Elizabeth McLaughlin, is already looking at ways to make next year's results more scientific.

A general profile of the 393 people who responded to the survey shows that 50 percent were male and 50 percent female, 6 percent lived more than 100 miles from the greater Richmond area, 88 percent were Caucasian, 45 percent lived in a two-person household, 54 percent had an income lower than \$100,000 and 80 percent were between the ages of 30 and 60.

Here are some of the highlights from the more-than-300-responder samples:

Two-thirds of respondents said the festival exceeded their expectations; 7 percent said it did not meet expectations.

Ninety-five percent said they were somewhat or very likely to recommend the festival to others.

Sixty-two percent were attending their first folk festival.

Of those who had attended other folk festivals, 64 percent said last year's festival in Richmond was better than others in relation to value for price. (Admission to the festival is free, so take that one however you like!)

Nine percent said they housed out-of-town guests during the festival.

Seven of 10 respondents were pleased with festival food services; 8 percent had no opinion or didn't eat or drink there.

One-quarter said they took a walk downtown in addition to visiting the festival; others visited friends or relatives (16 percent), went shopping (13 percent), did some sightseeing (8 percent) or visited a museum or art gallery (6 percent).

Generally, people were pleased with festival organization and signage, sound and lighting, parking arrangements and shuttle service.

Two-thirds of visitors heard about the National Folk Festival through a newspaper article. This being a newspaper, let's go ahead and mention that the 68th annual National Folk Festival, produced by the National Council for the Traditional Arts, will take place Oct. 13-15 in Richmond.

"We're very excited," said Alferio. "Given decent weather, we're expecting the crowds to even double."

The first several performing groups to join this year's lineup are scheduled to be announced April 17.

Watch for details in The Times-Dispatch, at TimesDispatch.com and at nationalfolkfestival.com.

This story can be found at:

http://www.timesdispatch.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RTD/MGArticle/RTD_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1137835170217

[Go Back](#)