



BLOW 'EM AWAY – Kingsville-Essex Associated Band member Craig Racicot plays a marching theme on his saxophone during the 27th Annual Ruthven Apple Festival parade Sept. 30. The two-day festival included food and craft booths, a farmers' market and rides, with all proceeds benefiting Community Living Essex County.

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Volunteers at core of Apple Festival success

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He sits on the festival steering committee and said preparations for this year's event started in February.

"It's something that grows on you," Hicks said. "It's been so good, I'd hate to see it quit."

Hicks helps with the traditional Saturday morning buffet breakfast, and in the afternoons, he spends time at the donation booth.

"There's always something that needs to be done," Hicks said. "I generally help out with whatever needs to be done."

Volunteers like Hicks have helped the festival raise \$449,000 for Community Living since that first uncertain year.

"Ron Hicks is a founding father of the festival," said Tony DeSantis, Community Living's manager of community relations. "We have a lot of volunteers who've put their lifeblood into this festival. Some of them have worked with us for more

than 20 years – it blows me away."

This year's festival, which took place at Colasanti's Tropical Gardens Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, is as important as ever, DeSantis said.

This is the first year Community Living is not registered as a United Way funded agency.

The United Way announced it would be dropping the organization from its list of charities because of financial troubles late last year. A shortfall in bingo revenues has also taken its toll on Community Living's fundraising.

"The festival is extremely important," DeSantis said. "And people have stepped up to the plate and contributed financially."

Although Community Living doesn't offer the transportation service anymore, there are still a lot of other needs such as staffing and providing direct support, DeSantis added.

All the fundraising dollars

support general programs for people with an intellectual disability and their families. Some of the services include supported living — supervision at home for residents that need guidance with day-to-day activities.

More than 500 people in Essex County benefit from the programs, DeSantis said.

Joe Colasanti, chair of the Ruthven Apple Festival Steering Committee, said some people mistakenly think some of the proceeds go to Colasanti's.

"All of it goes to Community Living," Colasanti said. "That's pretty much what Colasanti's is all about."

Colasanti has been with the festival for 25 years and offered the use of his facility about 20 years ago.

"We put up a good show," he said. "It seems to be the last festival of the season. People can go through the festival, and when they're done, come inside to Colasanti's. I think that's a good part of it."

The festival featured many musical acts. On Saturday, there were performances by Visions, Nothing to Lose, Nemesis, Derek Hearn and Undertow and Julie Walton.

On Sunday, the Dale Butler Trio, Hey Dogg, Area 51, the Emerald Isle Dancers and the True Ambassadors hit the stage.

The annual parade began at Clifford's Produce on County Road 34 and headed down onto Road 3 toward Colasanti's. The festival also included food and craft booths, a farmers' market and rides.



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