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Chainsaws, chili highlight Canton's new event

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After some 300 people came by to view the first Chainsaw Art and Chili Cook-off, organizers are hoping they've carved out a successful new event.

The event, put together by Canton Leisure Services and the Canton Public Art Committee, drew big crowds to the Lower Rouge River Recreation Trail, located off Morton Taylor Road at Michigan Avenue.

"We wanted to showcase the fall beauty of the trails and as an event to bring people together for a great time and for a great cause," said Jon LaFever, Recreation Coordinator. "Overall, it was a great success for a first-time event, and definitely has the potential to grow in the future."

The event included four chainsaw artists (two others backed out at the last minute), who provided demonstrations and displayed some of their work; LaFever said several pieces were sold as a result.

Two of the carvers - West Bloomfield's Tom Fink and Emil Szkipala of Chesterfield Township - also produced a permanent art piece along the trail.

"Many folks were astonished by how it turned out ... it's definitely worth a visit to the trails to see," LaFever said.

The event was the brainchild of Kim Michael, a volunteer with the Canton Public Art Committee. She said she's traveled enough, and watched enough television, to have seen some other



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chainsaw artist Emil Szkipala works on an eagle. Szkipala, of Chesterfield Township, calls himself "Chainsaw Man of Michigan."



Rose Pawluzka and Carlo Valentine dance to the music of Bob Balch and Carl Zimmerman.

logging competitions. She also talked to organizers of the Paul Bunyan festival in Oscoda as part of her research.

"You just see different ways of using things," Michael said. "We're always trying to

come up with new things to do to expose Canton to different ideas."

The chili cook-off drew two competitors - Tim & Sally's restaurant and the Canton Fire Department. Tim & Sally's put out a spread that included chili, hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken sandwiches and beef brisket.

"We're going to make a contribution to the (firefighters') Foundation, which benefits families victimized by house fires through the Canton Firefighters #2289 Charity Foundation," LaFever said.

Michael and LaFever were excited by the way the event turned out, and said plans are already underway for next year's festival.

"We've already been talking about a couple of things," Michael said. "We definitely want to do it again."