

# Record crowds visit apple butter event

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*THE GIRLS* performed Sunday at the Apple Butter Festival in Burton Township

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BURTON - - It takes the strength of two men to carry one copper kettle housing about 24 gallons of the rich apple butter, which drew record crowds to the annual festival this year.

It was the best Apple Butter Festival ever to be, said Marilyn Pickett, Geauga County Historical Society treasurer.

"It was the perfect weekend," she said. "We made and sold out of 35 copper kettles of apple butter."

People came from near and far for the festival, which has been in existence for about 45 years, Pickett said.

"I had people call from Cincinnati to ask for directions," she said.

The art of making apple butter has been crafted for about 20 years by kettle master Jim Wohlken, Pickett said. With seven kettles going at one time, the apple-butter chefs started on Friday and cooked all day Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and that's just counting cooking time.

It all started on Wednesday, Wohlken said, when 150 bushels of apples are prepared for the big weekend. At 4 a.m., volunteers come in to peel and core the apples, getting them ready for the 50 women who cut and slice them, he said.

When Friday arrives, 3 gallons of apple cider, 1 gallon of apple-cider concentrate and a bushel of apples are combined in the copper kettle and cooked for four to six hours, with someone stirring it constantly. After it's cooked, the kettle is carried over to the canning area, where the secret spices are added and more volunteers are waiting to fill Mason jars with the piping hot apple butter.

Wohlken started making apple butter in 1972 and worked his way up to become kettle master.

"It's the job you work at until you die, I guess," he said. "But I enjoy it every year."

Before 4 p.m. Sunday, the festival had sold out of apple butter, and folks waited patiently in line for Wohlken and his assistants to finish the last two batches for this year's festival. Different apples were used in the last two kettles, though, and it made the process a little difficult. Wohlken had to use apples the fritters were made with, which are hard and firm.

"The butter doesn't need hard firm apples," he said. "It needs soft apples that cook well."

Jonathan, Cortland and McIntosh apples are generally used in the apple butter. Wohlken was unsure what kind of apples were in the last two kettles.

As for why it's called apple butter, when there is no butter in it, remains a mystery. Wohlken said the only reason he could think of is that most people spread it on bread, like butter.

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