

AKRON HAMBURGER FESTIVAL

By Kathy Vogel

It is wholly tempting for me to travel down the “Schweddy Balls” -SNL-skit path when merely thinking about this mouth-watering festival. I could fill the entire page with puns and double entendres concerning “beef.” I’ll leave that up to you. But if you are indeed a serious beef lover like I am, then you better get your buns (sorry) over to Lock 3 Park in Downtown Akron for the National Hamburger Festival, July 18th and 19th.

Live music. Burger-themed games. Stuffing your face for a good cause-- Akron Children’s Hospital. This is a win-win situation.

“The City of Akron is proud to be the principal sponsor of the National Hamburger Festival.” said Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic. “It benefits our residents, it brings excitement to Greater Akron, and it unites the local community of providers of food and beverage services into a celebration of what makes our city great.” Well said.

If you’re concerned there won’t be enough to go around, fear not. Fifty different hamburger varieties from 16 eateries will be featured, with restaurants battling for some hardware in five different categories. Four new restaurants are throwing their spatula into the ring: Fuddruckers, Bravo! Cucina Italiana, Midway Oh Boy! and Red Wing Restaurant. Word of caution: pace yourself. You’ve got two days to beef-out.

Naturally, when you think of burgers you think of toppings. Like pickles. Vlasic will be hosting a “crunch off” competition both days. Each round will feature two people, with each person getting a pickle and a microphone. The loudest pickle crunch wins a prize. Oh, and you get to keep the pickle. Bonus.

You can’t beat a festival that’s gotten some lovin’ from The Food Network and Willard Scott over the years. I can smell the grill right now... Make my burger well, double-stacked, with pepper jack cheese and some spicy mustard!

It’s time to get your eat-on.

Hours: Saturday, noon-10:30 pm; Sunday, noon-7 pm.

Admission: \$5 per person; kids under 48-inches tall, FREE.

Need more deets? www.hamburgerfestival.com. Great photos, including ones from the Miss Hamburger Pageant. Meow. And, juicy burger facts as well as the great burger controversy.

AKRON ARTS EXPO

By Kathy Vogel

It's a tradition that happens every year on the fourth weekend in July. The Akron Arts Expo hits Hardesty Park July 25th and 26th, and she's a reliable summertime friend.

"There's something for everyone at the Expo," said Brittany Schmoekel, Community Event Coordinator for The City of Akron. "What's great is the economy hasn't affected the festival."

For the past 30 years, people have packed the Expo. For one, the price is right--free admission, and it's an opportunity to appreciate artists from all over the country, all at your own pace. Not only can you take-in the arts, but there's an interactive kids area called "Whimzy World." Crafters from Pat Catan's Craft Centers and The City of Akron will teach young, aspiring artist how to make whimsy animal crafts and other delights.

What makes the event cool is not only the "concessionaire row" for you to feast at, but there's all kind of entertainment, including roaming musicians. Very festive. By the way, the Ballet Theater of Ohio performs Saturday evening.

The Akron Arts Expo is the culminating event that weekend. If you want to be a true cultured warrior, venture over to Hardesty Park four days in a row. Thursday the 23rd features the Taste of Akron event. Foodies-- unite!

"We'll have 28 different vendors," said Schmoekel. "It's a good mix of restaurants, including upscale eateries like Mojo's and Piatto's. We have new and returning restaurants." There's something to please anyone's palate on this giant menu of food.

My mouth is watering just thinking about it. Make sure you don't miss the Finest Cut Steak Cook-off, with the winner taking home a sweet thousand dollars.

If you think you've got enough gusto, then make the Wine Tasting and Silent Auction on Friday the 24th a part of your plans. With 150 wines to sample, I'm sure you can keep busy.

The highlight of the evening is a silent auction, which serves as a preview to the Art Expo.

"All artists participating (in the Expo) are asked to donate something," said Schmoekel. "It's a way for fans of an artist to bid on items."

Think you can handle all of this? You'll have fun trying.

"It's an action-packed four days," said Schmoekel. You got that right, sista!

Taste of Akron hours: Thursday, 6 pm-10 pm; Free admission; \$2-\$6 per food sample.

Wine Tasting/Silent Auction hours: Friday, 6 pm-8:30 pm. Tickets \$40, \$75 per couple.

Art Expo hours: Saturday, 10 am-6 pm; Sunday, 10 am-5pm; Free admission.

For the skinny on all these events: www.akronartsexpo.org.

LOCK 3 STUFF

By Kathy Vogel

Right in the heart of Downtown Akron is a bustling area called Lock 3. Akron is all about nostalgia and history, and its intermingling with the canal system. And that's where this gem is located-- the perfect setting for live concerts, community events, and farmers markets.

Get out your Blackberry. Here's what you don't want to miss.

The Summit County Italian-American Festival: July 10th-12th

One of the biggest and best Italian heritage events in Ohio, spotlighting Italian food, music, language and culture. Free admission.

Atomic Punks, a tribute to early Van Halen

Stormbringer, a tribute to Deep Purple: July 17th

Free admission, both shows.

Bad Medicine, a Bon Jovi tribute band: July 24th

Free admission

The 4th Annual National Hamburger Festival: July 18th and 19th

Featuring America's favorite food, with over 20 restaurants participating. Live music, kids' area, contests and more. Admission \$5. Kids 48 inches and under, free.

David Sanborn: July 25th

Admission \$5

2nd Annual Fruit and Vegetable Carving Competition: July 25th

Over 20 professional and amateur chefs from across the country create unique works of art out of fruits and vegetables.

Relatively Jammin Blues Band

Simply the Best, a tribute to Tina Turner: July 31st

Free admission

The Deacons: August 1st

Admission \$5

The Satisfiers

U2 Incident, a tribute to U2: August 7th

Free admission

Lock 3 Live! Ladies of Blues, featuring Ruthie Foster and Marcia Ball: August 8th
Admission \$5

Diamond Dogs, a tribute to David Bowie
Majesty, a tribute to Queen: August 14th
Free admission

Sammy DeLeon Y Su Orquesta
Tito Puente, Jr.: August 15th
Admission \$5

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Rumours, a tribute to Fleetwood Mac
Free Admission

7th Annual Lock 3 Gospelfest: August 22nd
Free admission

LeBron James King for Kids Bikeathon: August 22nd

Denzon and the Road Dogs
Draw the Line, The Endorsed Aerosmith Tribute: August 28th
Free admission

The GeezeCats
The Turtles featuring Flo and Eddie: August 29th
Admission \$5

3rd Annual Melon Drop: August 29th
Benefitting the Akron Canton Foodbank. Drop melons from the State St. parking deck and watch them hit the pavement below.

The Market at Lock 3: through September 25th

Home Grown Saturday Mornings: through October

www.lock3live.com