

2018 FONDUE FEST IMPACT

The annual Downtown Fond du Lac Fondue Fest attracts 20,000 visitors (based on police estimates). The annual downtown Fall Festival began in 2000, when downtown merchants wanted to celebrate the reopening of Main Street following a lengthy construction project. Shops put sales on the street, and other vendors were invited. Since then, the festival has grown exponentially in every aspect: participation, attractions and attendance.

In 2007 the festival was given a new name – Downtown Fond du Lac Fondue Fest – and it attracted more than 15,000 attendees. The centerpiece for the festival became the World's Largest Fondue Set, which was created by an engineering and fabrication team from Brenner Tank. The "World's Largest" name was conferred by the Guinness Book of World Records and presented to the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership. This re-styled event attracted visitors and vendors from throughout the Midwest and was covered by media outlets from throughout Wisconsin and the Chicago Sun-Times. The festival was even covered nationally by CNN. Blogs and other Internet media sources provided additional buzz. The event was a great success and raised more than \$3,000 for the Fond du Lac AC Agribusiness Council.

In 2018 the number of fondue options expanded for the first time since 2007. Moraine Park Technical College Culinary Arts Program was back with cheese and chocolate fondue on the corner of Division and Main and the Noon Optimist Club served queso and pizza fondue on the corner of 1st and Main. In addition to live music, the festival also offered the first-ever fondue eating competitions on the Young Professionals of FDL North Stage and a dedication of the Civil War Memorial statue on the McClone Insurance South Stage. The Cujak's Coffee Bar Kids Zone was open from 9-2 for bouncing and climbing or petting and putting (mini-golf style). The day served as a fundraiser for numerous non-profits and included the annual BIG Splash & Dash 5K in Veterans Park benefiting Big Brothers Big Sisters and the 2nd Annual "Cheese And Quackers Rubber Duck Race" sponsored by Street Pedalers LLC to benefit Salute the Troops.

Visitor Profile

Police estimate that 20,000 individuals attended the event. Only a small number of participants (46) were surveyed. Using information from the survey and data from similar events statewide, the following visitor profile was developed. A majority (80%) of visitors are from Fond du Lac and the immediately surrounding area. An additional ten percent traveled from the broader region (10-60 miles distant), while the remaining ten percent traveled from elsewhere in the state. Most attendees had previously participated in the event, with roughly 10 percent of new attendees.

First time visitors spent slightly more at the event (\$47 versus \$40 average), but stayed for a slightly shorter period of time than returning attendees. The overall average stay at the event was just over 4 hours, with individuals reporting listening to bands as one of their primary activities staying significantly longer than other visitors (this did not necessarily result in higher spending).

Regardless of geography or familiarity with the event, social media was the most reported type of marketing viewed (54%), with word of mouth (10%) and radio (7%) as the next most reported source of information. Visitors generally had favorable things to say about the event, as evident by the large number of repeat visitors. Regarding the 2018 event, the largest number of positive comments were provided regarding the band lineup and the introduction of the children's area, although many felt that this attraction could have had longer hours and would have preferred that the dog zone be located further from the children's area. Other areas of feedback included a desire for additional wayfinding signs, more fondue-related activities and booths (apparently some booths sold out early), and a desire for more areas to sit and rest given the long average visit duration. Responses were mixed to the pet-friendly nature of the event, with equal numbers of positive and negative comments.

BUSINESS PROFILE

In total, 215 vendors participated in the event. These included a mix of prepared food, produce, artisan and resale goods, and businesses and nonprofits. Unsurprisingly given the nature of the event, prepared food vendors reported the highest earnings, with an average gross sales of \$3,256 per vendor, although actual sales ranged from \$800 to \$8,000. Other artisan and produce vendors earned significantly less, averaging \$481 with a range of \$81 to \$1,500 over the course of the event. Most business and nonprofit vendors were not offering direct sales of goods at the event and subsequent sales by these businesses are not included in impact estimates.

Based on a survey of 36 participating vendors, the event was successful, with 97% of vendors indicating that they were able to interact with attendees, and 91% reporting that attendees represented their target demographic. Just under 70% reporting an intention to return in future years. Only two vendors indicated that they felt the fees were too high, and a few others felt that the congestion made it difficult for set up and take down.

SPENDING

When combining the reported customer spending information and vendor sales data, total estimated spending as part of the event (sales at the event, funds raised by the 5k, spending at downtown businesses during the event, and resulting from travel to the event) are estimated to be \$840,490. Considering the additional wages earned by vendors, value of volunteer labor and additional spending multipliers, the impact on the region is estimated to be \$1.09 million.