

The Hampton Union

Seafood fest worthy of \$1 donation

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The organizers of the 11th Annual Hampton Beach Seafood Festival and Hampton Rotary Club will ask adult visitors attending this weekend's event for a \$1 donation. There's been some grumbling from local people because there has been a false rumor going around that people will be forced to pay the buck, but it isn't true. Visitors who don't wish to pay don't have to — even though it's only one dollar. But we feel this is one event that truly deserves support and its financial health depends on this extra injection of cash.

So our suggestion is to pay the \$1 donation — kids are free, by the way — and then enjoy yourselves. Isn't it worth it?

The Seafood Festival is one of the Seacoast's premier events. It is truly a family, food and fun oriented event that attracts the type of visitors the Chamber of Commerce and beach businesses want in the community. If the weather holds out this event will attract 100,000 seafood lovers from around the Seacoast and beyond. Hampton Beach has been trying to change its image for years and this is just the type of popular event that can help restore the area's appeal as a family destination.

We'd also like to help the Rotary Club and clear up some confusion that the \$1 donation is a fee for admittance to special events. This is not the case. It's just a donation for the festival.

We believe most people would gladly donate a dollar to help make sure the event survives year after year. Several years ago, we heard organizers almost didn't hold the event because funds were tight and it always runs in the red.

The festival was never designed to be a profitable event for the local chamber and in recent years organizers have run at a financial loss as the cost of paying for the infrastructure and everything else rises.

That does raise a point, however. Last year there were questions raised about how, given the popularity of the event, it could possibly be running in the red. Seacoast Newspapers made an offer to pay for an audit of the books in an effort to clear up those questions, but the offer was refused.

Given that the sponsors of the event are asking for more monies from the public, we hope they are adhering to established bookkeeping procedures. An event such as this does not need lingering questions about how it is handling its money. It should be pointed out that an audit of the Seafood Festival's books was done after the original allegations were made, and, according to Hampton Beach Area Chamber board member Michael Roy, "not a blemish was found."

From what we understand a portion of the funds raised through the donation will be applied to the festival's operating costs, and a portion will be donated to a variety of local charities supported by the Hampton Rotary Club. Charities include Hampton Child and Family Services and scholarship programs that benefit local students. The money stays in the community.

The concept of asking for a "suggested donation" is not new when it comes to non-profits hosting large events with wide appeal. Suggested \$3 donations at the mainstage events at the Prescott Park Arts Festival have helped that wonderful venue stay alive.

To allow wonderful traditions such as the Seafood Festival to disappear because they can't turn a profit would be a shame for townspeople and for those working to change the beach's image. Hampton Beach is not just a teen hang-out, it's a place for everyone. The Seafood Festival and its continued popularity will go a long way to accomplish that goal.