

Chiefland Watermelon Festival Draws Massive Crowd



Chiefland Watermelon Queen Katelyn Ressler is joined on stage by her court. From the left, second runnerup Ashley Cribbs, third runnerup Danielle Oscean, Queen Katelyn Ressler and first runnerup Presley Sanders. *Photo by Terry Witt.*

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

The 60th Annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival was a huge success judging by the record crowd attending the festival parade, which stretched for more than a mile.

Chiefland Woman's Club President Melanie Hutchinson said the first floats began arriving back at the start when the final floats were leaving the

Chiefland High School area. The Woman's Club sponsors and organizes the festival.

The parade stretched from the high school down to the final traffic light at U.S. 19 and County Road 345. People on the floats were running out of candy to throw to eager children running out to greet them along the parade route.

Many areas of the parade route were three people deep.

"I think it was the biggest crowd we've ever had," Hutchinson said.

Katelyn Ressler was crowned 2014 Chiefland Watermelon Queen. First runner-up was Presley Sanders, second runner-up Ashley Cribbs and third runner-up Danielle Oscean. National Watermelon Queen Brandi Harrison, Florida Watermelon Queen Megan Morgan and

Alabama Watermelon Queen Montana Savage, Newberry Watermelon Queen Katie Brown and 2013 Chiefland Watermelon Queen Shelbi Crews were part of the festivities.

The watermelon auction may have set a record, although no one could confirm whether \$4,440 was indeed a record.

County Commissioner Chad Johnson, who served as the guest auctioneer, believes the average may have been the highest in history. The 13 buyers paid an average of about \$341 for the watermelons they purchased.



Watermelon festival buyers are pictured. From the left U.S. Congressman Ted Yoho, County Commissioner and festival auctioneer Chad Johnson, Sheriff Bobby McCallum, Farmer Murray Tillis, A.J. Walker, Jack Spann, County Commissioner Ryan Bell, County Judge Tim Browning, Circuit Judge James Colaw, Circuit Judge Monica Brasington, Laurie Barker representing her husband, Property Appraiser Osborne Barker, and Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones. *Photo by Terry Witt.*



An honor guard leads the Chiefland Watermelon Festival parade on U.S. 19. Photo by Terry Witt.

Scoggins Chevrolet purchased the largest watermelon weighing 60.6 pounds and grown by Melba Tillis and Brycen Tillis, for \$420. Sanchez Farms purchased the largest group of three watermelons weighing 163.4 pounds grown by Tillis Farms, for \$550. With the high prices set by the first two bidders, candidates for public office and local businesses kicked into high gear and opened

their pocketbooks to purchase the remaining melons.

Reed Automotive purchased Maddilyn Johnson's 121.6 pound watermelon for \$400 and Ag Pro purchased Abigail Butler and Gracie Frazier's watermelon for \$310.

Those were the top four purchases and the first four on the auction block.

The Tour De Melon bicycle ride attracted 125 bikers.

Forty of the cyclists opted to ride 100 miles and the other rode shorter routes. The bicycle ride is a fundraising event by Suwannee Valley Rotary Club. The ride kicks off festival activities.

One of the busier sites on the festival grounds was the watermelon eating tent. The First Baptist Church Men's



The Tri County Veterans float was one of the most patriotic and colorful along the parade route. Photo by Terry Witt.

Ministry cut the watermelons and dished out slices to hungry festival visitors at no charge.

Farmers Murray Tillis, Bill Douberly and John Parris supplied about 250 watermelons. Chiefland Farm Supply donated the large tubs used to ice down the watermelons before they were sliced for consumption.

The Chiefland Woman's Club uses the watermelon festival to raise funds in support of local causes and charities. The club will also use the funds to put a new roof on its clubhouse on Park Avenue this year. The Woman's Club donates money to Haven Hospice, the American Cancer Society and Harmony Pregnancy Center.

The club sponsors an annual awards banquet for emergency personnel including the city police department and sheriff's office and gives a \$500 scholarship to one of the three schools. This year, the money will go to



The largest watermelon at the festival was grown by Melba and Brycen Tillis and sold for \$420 to Scoggins Chevrolet. Kelsi Alexander, holding the 60 pound watermelon, represents the grower and Terry Tillis represents the buyer. Photo by Terry Witt.

Chiefland Elementary School to purchase new curtains for the cafetorium. The club also donates food baskets at Christmas for needy families.



A record crowd watched the 60th Annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival Parade. Visitors on this section of the highway crowded close to the floats to catch candy and get a better view. *Photo by Terry Witt.*



The largest group of three watermelons grown by Tillis Farms was purchased by Sanchez Farms. Harold Tillis represents the grower and Jillian Sanchez represents the buyer. *Photo by Terry Witt.*



Chiefland Watermelon Festival royalty gather for a photo. Shown from the left Tymberlyn Watson, 10-12 year old watermelon queen, Shelbi Crews, 2013 Chiefland Watermelon Queen, Montana Savage, Alabama Watermelon Queen, Megan Morgan, Florida Watermelon Queen, 2014 Chiefland Watermelon Queen Katelyn Ressler, Newberry Watermelon Queen Katie Brown, National Watermelon Queen Brandi Harrison and second runnerup in queen contest Ashley Cribbs. *Photo by Terry Witt.*



National Watermelon Queen Brandi Harrison spends a moment with Brinely Othus, the Chiefland-Newberry 3-year-old watermelon queen and Lakelynn Owen, 1, the 1-year-old Chiefland-Newberry watermelon queen. *Photo by Terry Witt.*