

ROCKING THE GERMAN-AMERICAN FESTIVAL

Food, lots of music - and stone throwers - will be part of the fun

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Nathan Powell usually works out four times a week and has the powerful biceps to prove it. This weekend, though, he plans on trading in his usual free weights for something a bit more basic - a 138-pound rock.

The 18-year-old from Oregon will compete in the annual Steinstossen, or stone-throwing, contest at the 43rd German-American Festival, which begins tomorrow at Oak Shade Grove in Oregon and lasts through Sunday.

The festival features everything German, from beers to band members. But an annual highlight is the Steinstossen, a centuries-old Swiss alpine sport that hasn't gotten any easier over time. For men, it involves heaving a 138-pound rock as far as possible into a sand pit. Women toss a 75-pound stone. The local contest held Saturday and Sunday is open to all comers.



Shawn Sieg of Temperance, Mich., takes a drink of his beer during the German-American Festival in Oregon. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

When Powell demonstrated the event earlier this week, it was enough to make a spectator ache. He grabbed the sandstone and jerked it up onto his chest, resting it there momentarily before the final push over his head. Standing with the rock suspended above him, arms completely outstretched, he took a few big strides before thrusting it, red-faced, into the air.

Participating in the contest is a family tradition of sorts for Powell.

"I just remember going to it as a little kid and hearing about how my dad did it, so I thought I should try it," he said.

The women's winner in 2006 was his aunt, Beth Ackerman, of Oregon, who threw the rock more than 10 feet. (The women's record here is 12 feet, 11 inches. The top man hurled the stone 13 feet, 2 3/4 inches.)

"It's fun," she said. "I don't know why, but it's a lot of fun."

VIDEO

[Learn more about the Steinstossen](#)

Not everyone can get the rock above their head like Powell. Some try and toss it sideways or use even less orthodox methods. They may not hurt themselves physically, but Ackerman has seen others hurt something else over the years.

"Your pride," she said, "when you fall into the sand pit."

This year's Steinstossen contest will take place from 3 to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, with sign-ups an hour prior to that. For those who don't feel like heavy lifting on the weekend, however, there are plenty of other options at the festival.

There will be all your favorite German dishes and some you didn't know you loved until now. The festival will welcome back its jalapeno wurst and unveil a cheddar wurst. Not to mention the perennially popular potato pancakes, potato salad, other sausages, and more.

And beer. Lots of beer.

The festival will offer 24 different kinds of beer - with a twist. This year visitors will have the option of drinking it out of a plastic boot.

"Drinking out of a beer boot, while an old German tradition, is also sort of a cult thing from the movie Beerfest," said Tim Pecsénye, festival chairman.

He added that there are more advantages to drinking beer this way than mere novelty.

"The festival is actually going green," he said. "Instead of people buying a cup of beer and tossing it into the garbage, they save that boot."

Once your belly is full, there will be no shortage of excuses to polka or waltz, thanks to a huge dance floor and continuous live music from local Germanic and ethnic bands, with Die Fichtler Buam, a four-piece band from Germany headlining.

Other festival events include a Hummel look-alike contest for children ages 2 to 10 on Sunday afternoon and performances by folklore dance groups.

Sponsored by seven German and Swiss-American societies in the area, the German-American Festival takes place at 3624 Seaman St.

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IF YOU GO

Where: Oak Shade Grove, 3624 Seaman St., Oregon

When: Tomorrow: 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. Parade and opening ceremonies at 8 p.m.

Saturday: 2 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Sunday: Noon to 8 p.m. German language worship service at 10:30 a.m.

Admission: Adults are \$7 and kids 15 and under are free when accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Seniors with Golden Buckeye card or equivalent are \$6 on Sunday, and active military, police, fire, and EMS personnel admitted free Sunday with proof of employment. Advance tickets are \$6 at many area locations. Receive \$1 off general admission with donation of non-perishable food item from 6 to 7 p.m. tomorrow, 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, and noon to 1 p.m. Sunday.

Parking: Free on-site. Shuttles from Arnie's on Central Avenue near Secor Road; Berger's Olde Tyme Bar & Grill, 1742 Laskey Rd., and the Lucas County Recreation Center, 2901 Key St., Maumee, are available for \$6 round trip. They run starting at 6 p.m. tomorrow, 4 p.m. Saturday, and 1 p.m. Sunday. Pre-purchase on-site or at select area businesses.

Information: www.germanamericanfestival.net

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