



Published June 28, 2013  
LOCAL NEWS

## Sea Cavalcade focuses on family

Gibsons John Gleeson/Staff Writer

Gibsons Sea Cavalcade organizers have decided to put family first this year, moving Saturday's street dance to the afternoon and closing with the annual fireworks show on Sunday night.

"We really want to keep it a family-oriented festival," Sea Cavalcade committee chair Conchita Harding said Tuesday after the committee finalized its new schedule. "Every festival needs a change, eventually. By having what transpired last year, we will take some measures."

Last year's festival raised red flags after Sunshine Coast RCMP arrested 36 people in Gibsons Landing for liquor-related offences — more than double the previous year's record number of arrests.

Speaking at the June 24 Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) policing committee meeting, Gibsons Coun. Lee Ann Johnson said Sea Cavalcade volunteers surveyed residents and "discovered there may be up to an additional 5,000 people in house parties in the village area that's overlooking the water" during the annual festival.

"It's absolutely stunning. We had no idea," Johnson told the committee. "It's no wonder with the massive numbers of people and the massive amounts of alcohol being consumed. We just, as a community, hadn't taken into account what was going on there."

Roberts Creek SCRCD director Donna Shugar said she understood the concern with house parties, but questioned whether they were the source of last year's problems.

Attending the meeting, Cpl. Steve Chubey said he couldn't quantify how much of last year's public drunkenness spilled over from house parties.

"Our issues are primarily in the downtown core," Chubey said, estimating the average age of offenders at between 25 and 30 or under.

The revamped schedule kicks off with a teen dance at the Gibsons and Area Community Centre on Thursday, July 25, and daytime activities on Saturday, July 27, that include the mile run, parade, classic car display and Family Day in Holland and Winegarden parks, where there will also be special presentations, food and souvenir booths, a rock hunt, and story theatre performed by the Driftwood Players.

A family street dance — with no alcohol or drugs allowed — will run from 4 to 6:30 p.m. and Saturday activities will wrap up with a roller derby bout at the arena and the annual "boat blow-up" at 7 p.m.

The simulated explosion was also a topic at the policing committee meeting, with Shugar asking why the tradition was continuing.

“It causes pollution. How come the Town allows this to happen?” she said.

Pender Harbour/Egmont director Frank Mauro, saying as a boater he found the event “distressing,” drew laughter when he suggested the boat be replaced with “a large inflatable and let people blow it up — if you need to blow up a boat.”

School District No. 46 trustee Greg Russell said he didn’t understand the event either, having witnessed two propane explosions on boats when he worked as a young man at Thunderbird Marina in West Vancouver.

“Having seen somebody get blown through the cabin in their boat, it’s not entertainment. It just strikes me as absurd,” Russell said.

Despite the criticism, the committee opted not to send a letter to event organizers or Town of Gibsons officials.

“I don’t think it’s this committee’s role,” Shugar said.

In a follow-up interview, Harding defended the boat blow-up, which had been scrapped years ago, but was brought back due to popular demand.

Now dubbed a “rescue safety boat exercise,” the simulated explosion and fire is an opportunity for the Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue Gibsons unit to practise for the real thing, Harding said.

“It’s a way for volunteers to know how they can contain a fire on a boat and contain debris,” she said, noting that retired film industry professionals help set up the log boom around the boat and “they corral everything.”

The festival will close Sunday, July 28, with a fireworks display at 10 p.m., following a community celebration in Dougall Park from 5 to 8 p.m. that features live entertainment and ethnic food.

Other Sunday activities include a pancake breakfast, kids’ fishing derby, a mile swim from Keats Island to Armour’s Beach, canoe races, a wooden boat festival, the Sea Cavalcade regatta, food booths, a fashion show and a bike decorating contest.

With Brothers Park undergoing maintenance, one of this year’s challenges will be operating within the limited space of Holland and Winegarden parks, Harding said.

The committee will review the new festival schedule after the event and make necessary changes for next year, she added.

“Every year we learn something new,” Harding said.

The schedule can be found at [www.seacavalcade.ca](http://www.seacavalcade.ca).

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