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### **Community A Big Part Of Kutztown Festival's Hometown Feeling**

Community involvement is at the heart of the Kutztown Festival, one of the nation's premiere folklife events.

Just as building blocks make a structure strong, the participation of scores of local volunteers and more than twenty not-for-profit groups gives the annual 9-day festival a richness and vitality that visitors are quick to pick up on.

It comes across in the surveys where visitors comment on the friendliness and helpfulness of people working at the Festival. When they walk up to one of the many booths operated by local service clubs, community organizations, or churches, visitors receive a hearty hometown welcome. It's a tradition that is almost as old as the folklife festivals themselves, held for the past 54 years at the Kutztown Fairgrounds.

The good will ambassadors are the 200 local volunteers who live in and near this small Pennsylvania Dutch town and who give their time to the Festival, and the several hundreds more town folks who help out at the booths run by groups in the community. They are proud of their local history and traditions and enjoy explaining them to visitors.

It's a win-win arrangement, explains Dave Fooks, the Festival's executive director. "Visitors rave about our hometown hospitality. They say they can tell that this is truly Kutztown's Festival. In turn, local groups have an opportunity to interact with thousands of people, to enhance their image, and to raise funds to help support their own good works in the community."

Several service clubs operate food booths, dispensing local favorites such as schnitz un gnepp (apples and dumplings), corn fitters, and shoo fly pie. Food needs must be estimated, supplies ordered, and booth staffing schedules set up. It's a real team undertaking that starts months before the Festival. One church sponsors a popular strawberry shortcake dining spot, and another offers all-you-can-eat family style Pennsylvania Dutch dinners. Several other organizations interact with visitors at information and hospitality booths.

## **Kutztown Festival's Hometown Feeling - 2**

An example is the Kutztown Historical Society. The group sold 1,500 jars of delicious, homemade apple butter at last year's Festival. "This is a major fund raiser for us," explains Pam Smith of the historical society. "We were able to make our presence known to more of the local community and beyond. We had about 50 volunteers help with the project from sewing the ladies' dresses, to picking up the apple butter, working at the stand, set-up and clean-up, opening and closing the stand each day, scheduling, and so on," Pam said.

"In addition to being a fund-raiser for the preservation of our 1892 public school building, the home of the Kutztown Area Historical Society, we were able to make our presence known to more of the local community and beyond. I am always amazed to realize people from New York, Virginia, and many other states and countries, are as interested in hearing about our school building as we are in talking about it. I think all of us who were involved at the festival enjoyed the presentation of apple butter making as much as the visitors enjoyed hearing about the process. It's important to not only keep and preserve our historical buildings but to also remember how generations before us lived. This is what makes us who we are," she said.

The Festival, whose celebration of Pennsylvania Dutch traditions draws over 120,000 visitors each year, is itself a product of two community organizations – the Kutztown University Foundation, Inc., the fund-raising agency for Kutztown University, and the Kutztown Fairgrounds Association.

Featured in the Festival are 200 nationally-recognized, juried folk artists and traditional American craftsmen; over 2,500 locally handmade quilts and an auction of prize-winning quilts as part of one of the nation's largest quilt shows; historical reenactments, antiques and collectables, folklife demonstrations, folklore, 5 stages of entertainment, music, dancing, children's activities, and plenty of Pennsylvania Dutch food.

The 2005 Kutztown Festival runs from July 2 to July 10.

