

Monday, June 16, 2003

Ice cream pleases dads, raises cash for garden

By Bond Brungard

For the Poughkeepsie Journal

HYDE PARK -- There are countless duties that make fatherhood exciting or routine. There are daily errands, emergency room visits, Little League practice and meetings with teachers and principals.

And then there are times of reflection and pure affection.

"It makes me think about when they are born," Eric Stritt said of Father's Day while attending the F.W. Vanderbilt Garden Association annual Father's Day Ice Cream Social with his family Sunday.

Stritt thought hard about the meaning of Father's Day, and it came down to a simple message his son, Thomas, 7, wrote to him on a card.

"They start doing things that come from the heart," he said.

The rain stayed away Sunday and the flowers and plants in the tiered Italian garden shone brilliantly.

Tradition resurrected

The ice cream social is conducted to raise money for the garden's upkeep, and it re-established a tradition, about 10 years ago, that was conducted here in the early part of the 20th century for the children of Hyde Park.

There are many fund-raisers, including plant and art sales, that help the gardens, and new this year during the social was a long bed of begonias and an operational fountain.

"We have many fund-raisers," said Shirley Downing, the garden's ways and means chairwoman, "but this helps."

The fountain, known as Dolphin Boy, has sat in the sun, dry, for many years.

"It's been sitting here," said Downing, "and it was not operational."

In addition to the begonias and the other plants, the gardens include about 1,300 roses.

The ice cream was not free for children but dads got a free bite. That, said Jonathan Raskin, of New Paltz, while his two daughters, Ari and Noa, played, means a lot on Father's Day.

"Free ice cream for dad," he said. "That's a good thing."

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