



Photos by DEVON RAVINE | Daily News

Jennifer Young looks at some of the cut-glass wind chimes at local artist Daike Klement's Lifting Up Spirits booth Sunday afternoon at the Destin Seafood Festival. Visit nwfdailynews.com to see a slideshow of pictures from the festival Sunday.

Seafood fest breaks records

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DESTIN — The 33rd annual Destin Seafood Festival wrapped up Sunday with record-breaking crowds.

According to Kay Phelan, a spokeswoman for festival organizers, the weekend crowd was estimated to be about 51,000 people.

"I am just blown away because from Friday at 4:15 through Sunday it was wall-to-wall people for the entire 3/4-mile venue along the Destin Harbor," Phelan said. "I think making it down at the harbor made all of the

difference in the world."

Ruben Mendoza, a food vendor at the event, said the free admission was a big draw. He said his gator, shrimp and shark on a stick were crowd pleasers.

"I think this beat the Gulf Shores Shrimp Festival and the Pensacola festival," Mendoza said. "Everybody's happy. Everybody's making money, I mean everybody."

Melissa Firth was another happy vendor. Her booth of homemade jewelry was a big success. The Destin native said the festival was finally back where it was supposed to be.

Shalimar artist Toni Dineen entered her first



Two-year-old Emma Palmer flies through the air on a bungee ride Sunday afternoon at the Destin Seafood Festival.

contest for the Destin Seafood poster and won. She also set up her first booth, which she said sold a lot of prints.

"The most fun has

been the people walking in and saying they liked my work. That meant much more than any

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amount of money we made," Dineen said.

She said she was so excited by the response to her art that she started giving children a free print.

Fort Walton Beach resident Meganne Powell said bringing the festival to the harbor not only was a boost to local fishermen and restaurants, but focused on local seafood. The event returned to being a social one full of locals like Powell said it was 20 years ago.

The event did have a bit of controversy after People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals received complaints from festival goers who disliked that a steer was tethered to the

ground by a metal nose ring and had no access to water or shade.

Robbyn Brooks, a spokeswoman for PETA, said she verified the complaints Saturday. The animal was untethered soon after festival organizers instructed Alan Henderson, owner of Buckaroo pony rides, to do so. Buster the bull was tethered again Sunday.

"The steer stands still for hours at a time with no food or water and isn't able to even lift his head," Brooks said.

Henderson said he loved the animal and never would allow it to be abused and that those who complained were ignorant of the bull's

treatment. He said the biggest complaint he received was from a drunk man Friday night who threatened to cut the steer's throat rather than see tethered to the ground.

Henderson compared the ring to a horse bit and said there was nothing wrong with it.

"If they knew how we love on Buster, they would never say that. He is spoiled," Henderson said. "If he didn't want to be here, there's no way we could keep him here."

Brooks said no animal deserved to be exposed to loud noises and crowds, and the festival was not a steer's natural environment.

"You don't treat people or animals you love with that little respect and not the slightest consideration as to whether he is comfortable or in pain," Brooks said.

In addition to crowds and live music, Buster had to listen to a few squeals from Kendall Brown and her family: The Destin resident purchased a pig from the petting zoo. Henderson said the pig had been rescued from a slaughterhouse.

Brown listed three reasons the event was the best she had ever attended.

"We just bought a pig, it's (the festival) on the harbor, and it's free," Brown said as she took photos of her new pet.