

## HOLY EUCHARIST MINISTRIES A HISTORY OF THE PINE BARRENS FESTIVAL

In 1989, the decision was made to establish an annual festival for Holy Eucharist parish. The format would be similar to other church carnivals in the area, with emphasis on the unique demographics of being located in New Jersey's famous Pine Barrens. The purpose would be to raise additional funds for the parish and create an effort that would bring many parishioners together, as well as interacting with the public at large in our vicinity.

To be sure, this would be a major commitment of the resources of our parish community. But the success of other catholic parish carnivals in the area prompted us to accept the challenge, since we were confident that our community was as dedicated and talented as any. Starting from scratch was daunting, but with the input and support from St. Joan of Arc and St. Charles Borromeo carnival organizers, we were off and running.

Early on, it was decided that we would avoid bringing in any outside vendors, other than those necessary, such as rides and games. Each venue would have a chairperson and be staffed by volunteers. The overall organization of today has not changed significantly since our first year. Jack Nowicki agreed to head the festival the first two years.

Needless to say, the first year was a real learning experience. But, learn we did. After several years of using lumber frames for our booths, we changed over to PVC pipe frames. This was certainly an improvement, but PVC also had its problems and eventually another change was made by using galvanized pipe for the booth frames, which is still the case today. Originally, the midway was in the parking lot off Medford Lakes Road, but in constantly reviewing how to make everything work better, the midway was moved over to the Carranza Road parking lot. Given the absolute highest importance and priority, a comprehensive Safety and Security plan has been developed and regularly updated. Originally we used police officers from surrounding communities. When state laws were changed and we were allowed to hire off-duty State Troopers, that improvement was also implemented.

Over time, we went through several ride and games vendors, always attempting to get the most professional entertainment for our patrons while maximizing profitability for the festival. Each venue has made tremendous strides from those early days. The Canvas Café and the Beer & Seafood Garden have honed their skills to that of well-oiled machines. Pizza, burgers, and ice cream booths are all humming along with great precision. Entertainment and publicity have taken major leaps forward. Raffles seem to grow larger every year. Our Kiddie Corner and Cultural Booth are appreciated by many.

Beyond everything else, the Holy Eucharist community, through its annual Pine Barrens Festival, reaches out to those less fortunate. Each year we invite residents of New Lisbon, families being assisted by the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and children from an inner city parish in Camden, to be guests of Holy Eucharist parish.

What began so tenuously in 1989 has grown to become the most significant summer event in this area. Many parishioners get their first real sense of belonging to the parish through their involvement in our festival. Now when they attend mass, they can greet other parishioners by name and feel they are true members of our church. This is undoubtedly the most satisfying reward of our annual Pine Barrens Festival.