

Woodstock memories magnified

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Mostly, they remember the mud.

"My first impression of the place was just an incredible puddle of mud — mud — people and mud — naked people and mud ..." said Barry Brendel, a New Brunswick-based political consultant. It was a "sea of mud and rain and people."

Brendel had just completed his freshman year at Rutgers University in 1969. He was working as a hospital janitor to earn money for school. Brendel and a few buddies from his dorm talked about going to the Newport Jazz Festival, but the Woodstock Music and Art Fair near Bethel, N.Y., was advertising more of the bands they wanted to see, he

said, and "believe it or not, we bought tickets" — \$18 for the three-day event.

"About 10 of us packed into two cars," and started out Friday, Aug. 15, with a couple of knapsacks and maybe an apple or two. "We came prepared," he laughed. "We spent until Saturday morning in a 20-mile traffic jam" along with hundreds of thousands of others trying to reach Bethel. So many poured into the festival, held on Max Yasgur's farm, that tickets were never collected.

"A week before, no one was expecting that. It was increasing exponentially in the last week," Brendel said. "It became all of a sudden a cultural magnet — you *had* to be there. It went way beyond the mu-

See **MEMORY**, Page A6



Andrea Kane/The Home News

Judi Addis, shown left in the Woodstock era, is still an activist, working for the National Organization for Women at the Middlesex County Fair.

MEMORY

Continued from Page A1

sic."

Like Brendel, many local young people were drawn to Woodstock; among them, a Rutgers freshman who is now vice president of an outplacement firm, a New York University graduate student, now a clinical psychologist in Highland Park, and a 17-year-old high-school student from Oakland, now a full-time political activist living in South River. Twenty years ago, all four stumbled into a 400-acre puddle of mud in upstate New York, along with half a million other long-haired, blue-jeans-clad, peace-sign-sporting, drug-consuming hippies who came to hear Richie Havens, Sly & The Family Stone, Joan Baez, Country Joe and the Fish, Janis Joplin, The Who, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and many, many others.

Of four people interviewed last week who attended Woodstock, only one stayed until Jimi Hendrix's wailing electric "The Star-Spangled Banner" sounded in the early morning of Monday, Aug. 18. Most recall everyone caring and sharing, but couldn't really hear the music. Yes, Woodstock was a statement of a generation, they said, but Woodstock wasn't as significant as it's been made out to be. For at least one, the July 20 moon landing stirred more emotion.

Woodstock was supposed to be "An Aquarian Exposition" and turned out to be "a utopian dream in a disaster area" — free music, free food, free love in the mud. Organized by young rock entrepreneurs Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld, Yale law-school grad Joel Rosenman and cosmetics heir John Roberts, about 50,000 people were expected; 10 times that many — maybe more — came.

When Brendel and his friends arrived, helicopters were ferrying in bands that couldn't get to Woodstock any other way, and "naked people (were) running around, people dressed like you've never seen before, doing dances you've never seen before." Said Brendel: "I remember very little about the music."

Rain fell continuously. There was no shelter, food was short and there were few toilet facilities. By Saturday night, Brendel and his friends had had enough. They took a vote and it was unanimous — they left early Sunday morning.

Still, Brendel remembers Woodstock as "a cultural statement." The baby-boom generation was conscious of itself during its own development — conscious of its values becoming a national norm, Brendel said.

The overriding theme was that people can live together non-competitively — a very strong political statement at the time, Brendel said.

"The irony" he added, "is the generation turned out to be more Republican than the previous one." They hate government "with good reason, considering the formative experiences they had" during the Vietnam War, for instance.

Could Woodstock happen again? "You can't plan it," said Brendel. "They didn't plan that one. That was like a karma looking for a place to happen," he added.

In the summer of '69, Arthur Baer had just finished his freshman year at Rutgers and was working for the National Maritime Union in New York. He and four friends left

Friday afternoon in a Volkswagen with some "odds and ends food-wise" and a few sleeping bags.

Stuck in traffic several miles from the fair, Baer and his friends left the car by the side of the road and spent Friday night walking toward Bethel. Once there, Baer was disappointed to find "it was real messy ... you couldn't get close to anything," and he couldn't see or hear much.

Not only that, Baer was anticipating a monstrous traffic jam after the festival ended and he had to be back for work Monday. So he and his friends headed home Saturday. Woodstock wasn't such a big deal, anyway, Baer felt at the time. "In thinking about that summer, I remember feeling more about the moon landing than about Woodstock," Baer said, although "people I worked with responded almost in awe when I told them I went."

A resident of the Somerset section of Franklin, Baer is now vice president of an outplacement firm. Circumstances have changed too much to allow for another Woodstock today, he said; it is much easier to see your favorite rock stars — on MTV, for instance — than it was then. Even if a comparable gathering took place today, he said, it wouldn't be spontaneous, and "you wouldn't be talking about values."

Sandra Feldman was 25 and an NYU graduate student when she heard about the Woodstock Music and Art Fair on the radio. From the first, "I had the sense that it was going to be a happening, and I damn well wanted to be at that happening," she said.

Feldman and a friend, Maria, left for Woodstock around noon Friday, stopping in Parsippany to pick up another friend, Enid, who brought her three children ages 1-4.

The trip to Bethel was to take about 3 hours, but it took twice as long as usual. Feldman had bought tickets, but when "we walked through the fence ... I threw them on the ground," she said. "Maria picked them up and said these are going to be souvenirs someday."

They brought no supplies — "we sort of thought we could float in and out," finding shelter and food nearby. "We had no idea ... All I know is, in my life, I've never seen such a sea of bodies," and this "incredible atmosphere of just peacefulness, love, caring."

Yes, drugs were everywhere, Feldman said, but "we were babies. We were children. We were playing with just nothing" compared to crack, she said. "The worst acid trip didn't compare to crack." Those who took drugs then had dreams of building a better world; said Feldman, it wasn't so much of a "suicide trip" then.

Strangers contributed food for the kids, but conditions were just too difficult with toddlers along, so the women left late Saturday night.

A clinical psychologist, Feldman began her own practice this year in Highland Park. She also teaches at the New Jersey Center for Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy in Denville. After an Exxon tanker spilled millions of gallons of oil on the beaches of Alaska last spring, she thought about going there to help clean up. "Some people say 'I was at Woodstock' because it's cool," said Feldman. "And some people carry it with them."

At 17, Judi Addis traveled up the New York Thruway with three other women from Bergen County in a 1952 Cadillac convertible. "It was wonderful," she said. They

packed food and two pup tents and set out for Bethel on Wednesday. It rained a lot and was muddy, "but we got into it," Addis said. At 17, "you can find fun in anything." Addis didn't want to leave, staying on for a few days after Woodstock ended.

Much has been made of Woodstock as a political statement, but "I was pretty political before this," Addis said. At 16, she had gone to Chicago for the 1968 Democratic convention, and she had been running "Vietnam Moratorium" days in Oakland, her hometown. "A lot of people were just into sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and that's why they came to (Woodstock)." The media made it into a big political statement, she said. "I knew at 17 that I was the great generation," and didn't need Woodstock to affirm that. In any event, "I think that a lot of people who went to Woodstock, that was the only thing they did in their life."

Addis, on the other hand, remained active in the anti-draft movement of the '60s and early '70s; she is a past vice president of New Jersey's chapter of the National Organization for Women and currently chairs the Middlesex County Reproductive Freedom Task Force.

Addis lives in South River with her husband, whom she met at a commune in Pearl River, N.Y. Most of the people who lived at the commune have grown up and become professionals, she said.

"Everybody grows up," she added. "But some of us have not forgotten."