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GRAPE JAMBOREE

Grape Jamboree to take over downtown Geneva

WARREN DILLAWAY

WARREN@STARBEACON.COM

GENEVA — Purple is the color of the week as the Grape Jamboree takes center stage in the city's downtown and surrounding streets.

The opportunity to eat grape ice cream and grape pie are just a few of the drawing cards that brings thousands of people to the city to celebrate the harvest season and the chance to reconnect with family and friends.

Officials are gearing up for the big weekend, which will kick off around 9 p.m. Friday, when Broadway changes from a busy state route into a festival center with vendors providing food, drink, crafts and other entertainment options.

The transition occurs quickly and generally without incident, festival organizers and city officials had said.

The event is also a focal point for families, who often schedule vacation time around the weekend, Geneva City Manager Joseph Varckette said. "We are always excited for the Jamboree, it is one of the iconic events," he said.

Grape Jamboree President Brian Kelly said the event will be especially memorable this year, as the festival



Stephanie Kush and her dog, Bella, march with the Geneva High School band during the 2023 Grape Jamboree Parade in downtown Geneva.

celebrates the 60th year of bringing joy to Northeast Ohio and beyond.

He said there are a variety of strong entertainment options this year, including Richochet, a Nashville-based band scheduled to perform at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Attaboy thrilling fans at 5:30 p.m. Sunday, and Hotel California closing out the festival at 8:30 p.m. Sunday.

For many communities, one parade



Photos by Warren Dillaway | Star Beacon

Visitors to the 2024 Geneva Grape Jamboree check out vendors in downtown Geneva.

is the centerpiece of a festival or celebration, but the Grape Jamboree goes a step farther. Two large parades will highlight the weekend activities, starting at 1:30 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday.

The West Main Street infrastructure project is not expected to be a problem this year, Kelly and Varckette said. The parade will form up

on side streets before moving on to Route 20 just west of Circle K.

The parade features bands, politicians, animal acts and hundreds of people on lawn chairs and blankets from the west side of the city all the way to Austin Road, where the parades end.

For those looking to get their feet wet — literally — grape stomping

may be an attractive option, with a youth stomping event scheduled for 11:45 a.m. Saturday, and adults to follow at 12:15 p.m. On Sunday, the stompers are scheduled for youth at 12:30 p.m. and adults at 1 p.m.

Many local churches and civic organizations will sponsor vendors in downtown Geneva, featuring the sale of grape pies and grape ice cream.

On Sunday, worship services are scheduled for 10:30 a.m., and visiting festival royalty from around the state will be welcomed to town.

Afternoon vocal entertainment is also scheduled for Sunday afternoon, with the Geneva GIs, the Geneva High School show choir, scheduled to perform at 4:20 p.m., and the Sojourner Quartet, a gospel group, at 5 p.m.

Many craft and merchandise vendors will be located along Broadway, featuring a wide variety of items.

The festival stage will be set up on Broadway, near the Route 20 intersection.

Much of the festival activity is focused on the stage, including the grape stomping and many of the entertainment options.

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GRAPE JAMBOREE

Pageant a major part of Grape Jamboree

Bree Judd, center, reacts as she was crowned Junior Miss Grapette Saturday evening at Geneva High School. She was crowned by outgoing Junior Miss Grapette Hailey March, left, and 2024-25 Miss Grapette Rylee Rogers on Saturday evening at Geneva High School.

Warren Dillaway | Star Beacon



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GENEVA — Two dozen young ladies took part in the 2025-26 Miss Grapette Pageant Saturday evening at Geneva High School.

The chance to grow as people is a big part of the pageant which has five different age categories of competition.

The experience has helped them become better people, the contestants and pageant director Chrissy Jeppe said Saturday evening.

The youngest category was Future Miss Grapette and included Bexlee Tinney, Kinsley Bradley and Aspen Vaught earning crowns.

The overall winner was Miss Grapette Jordan Verdi, who will have Cailyn King as first attendant and Addison

Merinar as second attendant.

Rylee Rogers, last year's Miss Grapette, gave a lengthy goodbye speech, thanking her family, other contestants and the community for her year representing the Geneva area all over the state of Ohio at festivals and through volunteering in the Geneva area.

She warned the crowd that her speech might last awhile.

"It is kind of tough to have a short speech when [I] have been in the program [for] 10 years," Rogers said.

She thanked her family and friends, and detailed her interactions with many of the other contestants in the pageant.

The Junior Miss Grapette category included seven contestants. Bree Judd earned the queen title, Taylor Verdi

See **PAGEANT** on C11



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Jordan Verdi participates in the evening gown competition before being named Miss Grapette at Geneva High School Saturday night.

GRAPE JAMBOREE

Festival to feature parking options this year

WARREN DILLAWAY
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GENEVA — People tired of walking long distances from their car to the the Grape Jamboree will have another option this year.

Grape Jamboree President Brian Kelly said visitors may park at Geneva Middle School and take free shuttle transportation to the festival this weekend. He said Sunset Transportation offered the option and the Geneva Area City Schools agreed to allow use of the school's parking lot.

Parking is also available at Memorial Field and handicapped parking across from the police sta-

tion, he said.

While new options highlight the parking situation, many people will continue to arrive early and utilize parking lots and front yards along Route 20 Saturday and Sunday afternoons to view the parades both days. Parking is also available along numerous back streets in the area.

Many set up lawn chairs in the back of vehicles to watch the parade and talk with friends and family while waiting for the many units to arrive.

The festival started 60 years ago to celebrate the grape harvest season that has always been a big part of the area. The grape-growing industry has

changed drastically over the years, as many growers have moved from Concord juice grapes to wine-pro-

ducing fruit.

The festival weekend will be a busy time for area wineries, with many

people in town looking for entertainment options that include food and drink.

The downtown area will

also be busy with foot traffic that will bring customers to many downtown stores.



Photos by Warren Dillaway | Star Beacon

The Madison High School band was one of more than 75 units that participated in the 2023 Grape Jamboree Parade in downtown Geneva.



Members of the Geneva High School band perform during the 2024 Grape Jamboree parade in downtown Geneva.



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GRAPE JAMBOREE

Kelly continues to provide leadership to Grape Jamboree

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GENEVA — While Cleve-

land weatherman Jeff Tanchak is a face of the Grape Jamboree, Brian Kelly is the voice of the festival and orga-

nizer behind the event.

Tanchak has been a focal point of the marketing of the jamboree for decades and will

continue to bring attention to the festival. He was the emcee of the Miss Grapette contest last weekend at Geneva High

School, and will continue to be involved this weekend.

"Tanchak is the face of the festival, and I am the voice," said Kelly, who lives in nearby Perry, and is the president of the Grape Jamboree. He works with a large committee that has kept the festival going for six decades.

Kelly said he started volunteering at the festival and became an announcer, then volunteered on a committee. He became a board member and eventually took over for Dave Johnson, who headed the committee for many, many years.

Kelly had the unfortunate challenge of having to cancel two festivals during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the festival is back to full speed.

He said the city is extremely cooperative in helping make the event happen.

The committee has been operating the festival so long, it comes together very well thanks to the cooperation and effort of so many people, Kelly said.

The festival celebrates grape growers, who harvest 1,500 acres of grapes annually.



Warren Dillaway | Star Beacon

Grape Jamboree President Brian Kelly addresses the crowd during the 2024 Miss Grapette Pageant at Geneva High School.

Kelly said the committee seeks to improve a portion of the festival each year, but also celebrates the traditions that bring people back to the community year after year after year.

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Blue Star mothers wave to the crowd during the 2023 Grape Jamboree Parade.



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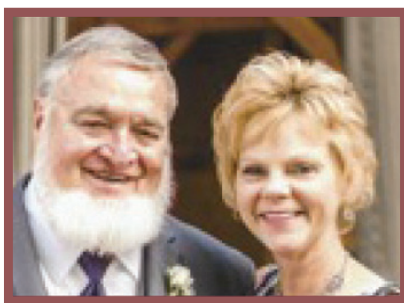
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GRAPE JAMBOREE



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Miss Grapette Rylee Rogers, center, reacts with fellow contestants Cailyn King, left, and Emily Winkleman, right, during the 2024 Miss Grapette Pageant at Geneva High School. Rogers was crowned Miss Grapette.

Pageant royalty helps community year round

WARREN DILLAWAY
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GENEVA — The Miss Grapette Pageant has been creating royalty for 60 years.

Chrissy Jeppe is a driving force that keeps the event moving along and serving the community.

She said there were 25 contestants preparing for the pageant, which includes participants modeling their outfits, answering questions and learning the ins and outs of public speaking.

“Our group of girls has been at least 63 different events throughout the year,” Jeppe said. She said local community service has been a focal point of the pageant winners this year.

“They did a lot of nursing homes, and were also at the local fair,” Jeppe said.

She also said the girls participated in fairs around the state.

Jeppe feels the pageant is an excellent networking experience for participants.

It gives them a chance to expand their horizons by trying something new, Jeppe said.

The royalty will host a large welcome event Sunday that will greet dozens of royal courts from festivals throughout the state.

Jeppe said last year, 107 people attended the event, which took place at SPIRE Academy.

Geneva High School hosted the 2025 pageant, featuring contestants from numerous age groups.

Each year, the outgoing queens share their experiences, often shedding a few tears, as they reflect on a year of growth.

A new royal court has started a year of learning, service and growth after winning their age groups Saturday at Geneva High School.



Geneva Area Chamber of Commerce 2024 Citizen of the Year David Johnson waves to the crowd during the 2024 Grape Jamboree parade in downtown Geneva. Johnson was president of the Grape Jamboree for many years and is still active in assisting the festival.

GRAPE JAMBOREE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY

- **10 a.m.** — Welcome by Jamboree President Brian Kelly. Blessing of the Festival by Rev. Mike Cole of The United Church of Geneva.
- **10:10 a.m.** — Introduction of Grape Jamboree Spokesperson Jeff Tanchak, morning meteorologist from Cleveland 19 News
- **10:15 a.m.** — Melissa and Mitch Acoustic Duo.
- **11:45 a.m.** — Youngster Grape Stomping. Sign-up for contestants under the age of 12 begins at 11:15 am behind the main stage.
- **12:15 p.m.** — Grape Stomping. Sign-up begins at 11:45 a.m. behind the main stage.
- **1:30 p.m.** — Jamboree parade
- **2:30-5:30 p.m.** — Appearing in the Winery: The Bob Potts Band
- **3 p.m.** — Welcome and plaque presentation to Parade Marshall, 2024 Geneva Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year Joe Ortiz.
- **3:10 p.m.** — Introduction of this year's Miss Grapette and her court
- **3:30 p.m.** — Parade awards
- **4:45 p.m.** — Pie eating contest. Sign-up begins at 4:15 p.m. behind the main stage.
- **5:30 p.m.** — Craig Hendricks
- **6:30-10 p.m.** — Appearing in the Winery:

Dirt Country

- **7 p.m.** — Comedian Bryan Sternik
- **8:30 p.m.** — Ricochet

SUNDAY

- **10:30-11:30 a.m.** — Community church service
- **Noon** — Welcome
- **12:10 p.m.** — Pie-eating contest. Sign-up begins at 11:30 a.m. behind the main stage.
- **12:30 p.m.** — Junior grape stomping. Sign-up for contestants under the age of 18 begins at 12:15 p.m. behind the main stage.
- **1 p.m.** — Adult grape stomping. Sign-up begins at 12:45 p.m. behind the main stage.
- **2 p.m.** — Jamboree parade
- **2-7 p.m.** — Appearing in the Winery: Going Gray Band
- **3:40 p.m.** — Welcome and introduction of festival queens from all parts of Ohio
- **4:10 p.m.** — Parade awards
- **4:20 p.m.** — Geneva GI's, Geneva High School's Show Choir
- **5:15 p.m.** — Gospel hour — Sojourner Quartet from Findley
- **6:15 p.m.** — Atta boy
- **7:45** — Hotel California

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Monday	6:15-7:00	Musical Theater NEW CLASS!	ages 7-12
Monday	7:00-7:45	Jazz	ages 7-12
Wednesday	4:45-5:30	Little Dancer Jazz/Pom	ages 3-5
Wednesday	5:30-6:15	Hip Hop	ages 5-9
Wednesday	6:15-7:00	Cheer/Pom NEW CLASS!	ages 5-10
Wednesday	7:00-7:45	Hip Hop	ages 10+
Thursday	4:45-5:30	Tap NEW CLASS!	ages 3-6
Thursday	5:30-6:15	Acrobatic Arts	ages 5-12
Thursday	6:15-7:00	Tap NEW CLASS!	ages 6-12
Thursday	7:00-8:00	Teen Combo Jazz/Contemporary	ages 12+

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GRAPE JAMBOREE



Photos by Warren Dillaway | Star Beacon

Adelaide Nichols, center, was crowned Little Miss Grapette Saturday evening by 2024-25 Miss Grapette Rylee Rogers, right, and 2024-25 Junior Miss Grapette Hailey March at Geneva High School.



Harlow Nester was crowned Young Miss Grapette Saturday evening during the Miss Grapette Pageant at Geneva High School.



Taylor Verdi prepares to answer a question by Miss Grapette Pageant spokesman Jeff Tanchak Saturday evening.



Addison Merinar, left, receives the Miss Congeniality Award from 2024-25 Miss Grapette Ryle Rogers Saturday evening during the pageant at Geneva High Schools.



Grape Jamboree spokesman Jeff Tanchak was the host of the Miss Grapette Pageant Saturday evening at Geneva High School.

GRAPE JAMBOREE

PAGEANT

CONTINUED FROM C4

was first attendant, and Piper Rogers, second attendant.

Outgoing Junior Miss Grapette Hailey March thanked her family and friends, and explained how nervous she was at the start of her reign, but how much she learned and grew during the year.

Jeppé said the older contestants had a morning interview with the judges, and were judged on their on-stage introduction and evening gown contest.

Geneva Grape Jamboree spokesman Jeff Tanchak joked with the contestants and did a variety of dance moves to create a light mood for the event that drew several hundred people to the high school.

The pageant was changed slightly this year so the younger contestants could get

home to bed.

"We wanted to get the little ones out of here a little earlier," Jeppé said.

The two categories for the older girls involved answering a question relating to kind-

ness and why it is important.

Geneva Grape Jamboree President Brian Kelly gave a brief schedule of the event planned for Saturday and Sunday.

"I hope to see you all at the

2025 Grape Jamboree," he said.

Tanchak said the festival is very important to the community.

"This is like their Super Bowl," he said.

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