

'The best day we've ever had!'

That's how some children described this year's Ringwood Family Fun day, which took place on Bickerley Green on Saturday 30th May. They enjoyed loads of inflatables: bouncy castles, giant slide, assault course, bungee run, gladiator joust, bouncy basketball, human table football and sumo wrestling. For many families such an afternoon would have been far too expensive, but that was the phenomenal thing about this event ... it was all free! ... entertainment, crafts, face-painting ... even all the food!

Why on earth would they do such a thing? Local church leader Adam Skirton explained, 'The church is here not just to share the good news about Jesus, but to **be** good news to the community. Jesus inspires us to love and give and serve, so that is what we do.'

The crowds were also entertained by a brilliant bird display from Liberty's Owl, Raptor & Reptile Centre, riveting races from Wessex Ferrets, delightful dancing from New Forest School of Dance, regimented races from local Army and Air Cadets and some zany zorb football, courtesy of Zorb Zone Ltd. Additionally they were also treated to music from the likes of Mikey and CJ, Jon Cotton, Tempo Brass, Salvation Army Band and the afternoon was kicked off by the ever popular Gugge 2000 band.

Many of the children, and the 'not so young', loved seeing the Austin 7 Vintage cars, vehicles from the emergency services, and a John Deer Tractor from New Forest Farm Machinery proved to be very popular. Wagon rides from Sampson Farriers' shire horses, sponsored by McCarthy and Stone, were also a great hit.

Families especially enjoyed the 'It's a Knockout' style races for children and adults, thanks to the Ringwood carnival committee, with Ringwood Juniors beating Poulner Juniors this year. New Mayor, Councillor Michael Thierry even crowned the Carnival Princesses!

Last year was dubbed '**The feeding of the 5000**' and this year even more people turned up! But the organisers, **Churches Together in Ringwood and District** were ready, with more than 3000 burgers, 1000 cream teas, 2000 hot dogs, 3200 ice-creams, 240 pints of milk for hot drinks, a couple of tonnes of water, loads of squash and countless cakes. All given away for free, thanks to the generosity of many of sponsors including Churchill Retirement (Ice-Creams) and Moyles Court School (hotdogs).

Church member Peter Ellis, from Belinda's Bakery, who masterminded the catering operation said, 'To be able to serve that many people, the volunteers were amazing! Brilliant! I could not have asked for better people to work with.'

A sea of more than 200 blue shirted volunteers from 11 local churches were supported by more than 30 enthusiastic Theology students from Moorlands College, just down the road in Sopley. Dr Ian Kirby one of the Vice Principals said, 'The students loved being able to serve the community in such a large and exciting project. They were amazed how well all the different parts fitted together.'

Many local business stalls were part of the nearly 90 groups who contributed to the day in one way or another. The only criteria was that everything had to be free. And ... it really was!

The free gifts included many hundreds of children's books, Bibles and booklets. Families' Pastor Nick Magor said, 'It was incredible the number of families who came into the Messy Church Tent. They seemed to love the puppets, crafts, games and singing. Every week there is a messy church in Ringwood, alternating between various churches and new families are always welcome to join us.'

Messy church (a national initiative) is generally aimed at families with children aged 0-7, but older children seem to be enjoying it too. It takes place at Poulner Baptist Chapel on the 1st Sunday of the month (4-5.30pm), 2nd Sunday at All Saints Parish Church, St Ives (3.30-5.30pm), 3rd Sunday Trinity United Church, Wesley Centre (4-6pm) and 4th Sunday at St John's Church (4pm).

The Ringwood Family Fun Day Facebook page has had hundreds of likes, and has loads of photos from the fun-packed day. The website – www.ringwoodfamilyfunday.co.uk, gives details of the churches involved and also all the community groups and businesses, who either came on the day, sponsored or helped in some way.

One that didn't quite make the programme, was Radian Group Ltd, as their very generous donation, paying for many of the hired marquees, came in just after the programme was printed.

Local church leader Adam Skirton added, 'We are thankful for the support of the Town and District Councils and the other businesses and groups who were part of the day. Of course it was Christians from the various Churches in Ringwood and District, who together organised the event, provided the volunteers to run it and gave much of the funding. It was great to be able to reflect Jesus' love in such a practical way'.

A pile of lost property from the day can be found at Poulner Baptist Chapel, so please call 473388 if you left anything behind!

'What's next?' you may well be asking. Well ... the churches are looking to organise a Family Fun Day every couple of years, alternating with the Pedal Car Grand Prix, but there are many other ways in which the churches serve the community, including clubs and activities for all ages ... as well as their regular Sunday services – all are welcome.

One future activity that might be of interest to readers are Alpha Courses.

Alpha is an opportunity to explore life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal atmosphere. Supported by all the main Churches, 27 million worldwide have done a course, including more than a million people in the UK.

The next local courses are hosted by Poulner Baptist Chapel on Tuesday mornings (10.30am to noon – including a crèche), starting on 16th June and Thursday evenings (7.30-9pm) starting on 18th June. To find out more call 473388 or email admin@poulnerchapel.plus.com

The organisers would really appreciate feedback from the community to make the next event even better, so feel free to give your comments via the fun day website.



Picture (Mandy Catto advertises the popular Alpha Course)

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