

A wicket game

Croquet and Family Fun Day a time for charity, fierce competition

By Eric Beidel
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Stephens City — For most, the day at the park was carefree — fun for the sake of charity.

For a few, though, it was serious business.

About 2,000 people came out to the Frederick County Rotary Club's fifth annual Croquet and Family Fun Day on Saturday at Sherando Park near Stephens City.

People checked out a car show, some live music, and a comedic barbershop quartet. Some took to the skies for hot-air balloon rides.

The centerpiece of the day was the centuries-old sport of croquet.

While many people enjoyed a few playful rounds of the relaxing game, the spirit of competition was much more intense for two families.

"We're here for blood," Jim Kostka said.

"The competition is to beat the Kings," his wife added.

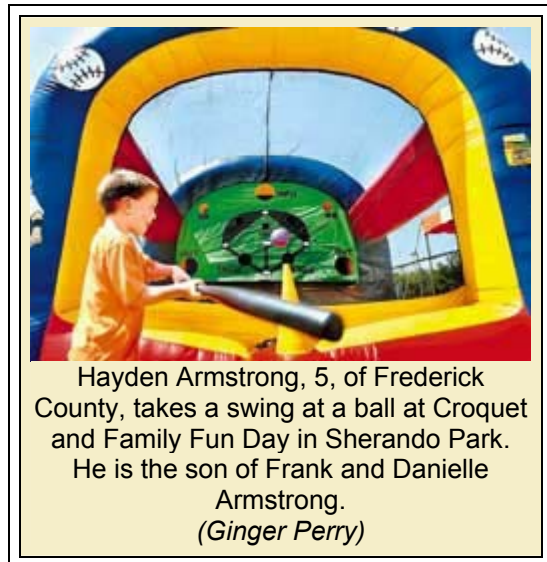
The Kostkas — Jim, Theresa, and their three children — have come from Leesburg to the Rotary Club's event each year since it began.

The Kings come from Gore. The family members have many a first-place trophy from the croquet event.

The Kostkas' goal on Saturday was to dethrone the Kings.

They practiced hard, and had gone through three croquet sets in their backyard.

While the Kostkas were engaged in their first matches of the day, Brian King watched closely from the sidelines, even stepping on the field to challenge a ruling at one



point.

"It's almost like the Hatfields and McCoys," said Joe Myer, one of the organizers of the Rotary event.

While the tension between the two families has led to heated matches over the years, King said he's growing tired of the rivalry.

"The Kostkas are the ones that want [the first-place trophies]," he said. "I personally would rather play some new competition."

His father, John King, stood head and shoulders above the competition over the years.

Several people came up to the 78-year-old as he watched matches on Saturday and asked him why he wasn't playing this year.

"I just don't want to," he said repeatedly.

Some said "Grandpa King" wanted to allow others a chance to win.

"I couldn't beat Grandpa King," Jim Kostka admitted. "Even when I went poison, he still beat me."

To go "poison" means a player has cleared all of the wickets, and instead of knocking a ball into the finishing stake, purposely tries to hit the other player's ball to knock them out of the game.

Five years ago, the croquet tournament was the biggest draw at Croquet and Family Fun Day. Since then, the attendance numbers have grown 30 percent each year, and croquet is just "another thing to do now," Myer said.

A silent auction at the event offered everything from a trip to Paris to home furnishings.

Kids crawled around in numerous inflatable play areas, and muscle-car owners showed off their machines' powerful engines.

In five years, the Croquet and Family Fun Day has raised more than \$150,000 for charities.

This year, the money will go to the Fremont Street Nursery, Healthy Families Northern Shenandoah Valley, and the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum.

It took about 75 volunteer workers to pull off Saturday's event.

It will probably require more next year, as the day's organizers expect attendance to keep growing.

"This has gone from something that was a test run to something that people ask

about and look forward to," Myer said.

On Saturday, the Kings got the better of the Kostkas again.

Brothers Cody and Corey King won first place in the two croquet tournaments. A few Kostkas also placed, but behind the Kings.

Most of those receiving trophies ranged from 11 to 19 years old.

"Youth prevailed over age," the tournaments' co-chair, Bill North, said.

Grandpa King must have had a premonition.

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