

Larry Joe Taylor Festival Planners Savoring Success

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The campers have all gone home and music no longer drifts through the air at Melody Mountain Ranch, but coordinators of Larry Joe Taylor's 15th annual Texas Music Festival and Chili Cook-off are savoring their success in the wake of the highly-anticipated event.

Held in Stephenville after moving from its previous location in Meridian, the four-day festival came to a close on Saturday, attracting between 18,000 to 20,000 people.

"That's a little more than we had last year; it was more than we expected," said Zack Taylor, drummer for Larry Joe and one of the event coordinators. "We were very, very pleased with it."

More than 100 employees were hired to work at the event, and Taylor said the staff encountered only "a few minor problems that were quickly taken care of." He added that the community was supportive of the festival and accommodating to the people who attended.

Although Larry Joe's staff has only just begun to look at changes to next year's festival, Taylor said they already know that more parking will be needed next year and nighttime driving around the campsites will be eliminated to help avoid problems.

According to Taylor, the staff spent \$10,000 to hire off-duty Stephenville and Dublin police officers to serve as security at the festival. The number of arrests and driving while intoxicated charges decreased from last year, which Taylor said was encouraging to the staff.

Doug Montgomery, owner of Texstar Ford, a major sponsor of the festival, called the event "a huge success" that greatly benefited the Stephenville economy.

"With the move to Stephenville the festival was a better value for the fans — bigger name stars, more room and closer to town," Montgomery said. "We are fortunate to have a celebrity like Larry Joe with his loyal following, host this festival in his hometown. There are communities like Fort Worth that would love to have the Texas Music Festival."

Taylor said the performers, which included Jerry Jeff Walker, Cross Canadian Ragweed and Jack Ingram, and vendors were complimentary of the staff and facility. He said that although it is too early to say if the festival will return to Stephenville next year, Larry Joe and his staff will discuss that possibility with the Melody Mountain owners and other community members before coming to a final decision.