

High-flying Maker Faire planned

Event to include drone demonstrations

By JOHN MATUSZAK
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — For the past two years, the Southwest Michigan Mini Maker Faire in St. Joseph has demonstrated that the sky's the limit when it comes to innovation and creativity.

This year's event, set for 10 a.m.-4 p.m. June 3 at Whirlpool Field, will take that a step further with aerial drone demonstrations and races.

On Monday city commissioners approved a request to use the surface of the Whirlpool Compass Fountain for drone racing. The permit for the event, which includes hands-on displays of robotics, rocketry, 3-D printers and the arts, had been approved in January. But organizer Joe Rommel, a technology coordinator with Berrien RESA, ex-

plained that the opportunity to show off drones came up recently.

The fountain itself will be closed from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Matt Quinn, director of flight operations with the Great Lakes Drone Co., which will mount the exhibit, said the fountain's circumference will be covered with nylon netting that will enclose the drone race course. Another barrier will surround the field, and spectators will watch the races from behind this fence, he said.

The closure period will provide organizers with enough time to set up the demonstration and then take it down so the fountain can be used by visitors.

The exhibit will include commercial and recreational drones. Plans call for a Whirlpool Corp. drone tent.

Quinn said that drone racing is becoming as popular as NASCAR around the country. Operators wear goggles that allow them to see from the point of view of the drone as they steer through a series of obsta-



Don Campbell / HP file photo

Volunteers show children soldering techniques during the 2016 Southwest Michigan Mini Maker Faire at Whirlpool Centennial Park in St. Joseph. This year's event, set for June 3, will include drone demonstrations and races along with other technology and art activities. City commissioners approved closing the Whirlpool Fountain for part of the day to make room for the drone race demonstration.

cles. Some of the drones are small enough to fit in your hand, he said.

Although the airspace to

be used is supervised from South Bend, the project has the approval of the director of Southwest Michigan Regional Airport.

Lake Michigan College and the Krasl Art Center are among the other organizations participating in the Maker Faire. The local event is one of more than 150 held nationwide to encourage interest in science, engineering and technology. Last year's Southwest Michigan event had some 30 makers, and 2,000 people attended.

Information on the event is at www.swm.makerfaire.com or at their Facebook page.

In other news, the Heritage Museum and Cultural Center received permission to erect signs at the city's Tiscornia Park, providing information about its guided tours of the St. Joseph lighthouses.

Tracy Gierada, interim director of the Heritage Museum, said this will include placards that can be changed to alert visitors to hours of available tours and

cancellations due to weather or other conditions. An enclosed sign will be placed near the parking kiosk that will provide additional information about the tours.

Having the updated information near the parking meter will prevent people from paying the fee if their tour has been cancelled that day, Gierada said.

It will be the responsibility of museum staff to place the signs.

The Heritage Museum began conducting tours last summer following the city's completion of a \$2 million restoration project of the lighthouses, built in 1907 and acquired by St. Joseph from the federal government.

North Pier walking tours and tours of the inner lighthouse will be offered Fridays and Saturdays from Memorial Day through Labor day, with special events including the summer solstice sunset and Tri-State Regatta viewings. Information is at www.theheritagemcc.org.

Contact: jmatuszak@TheHP.com, 932-0360, Twitter: @HPMatuszak