

Derby Day feted in Southport with mint juleps, fancy hats, even horses

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It had all the elements of the celebrated Churchill Downs event: fancy hats, a swing jazz soundtrack, navy blue blazers, Kentucky-style food, mint juleps ... even race horses. It was just a few miles to the northeast ... about 840 to be exact.

Late Saturday afternoon, the Pequot Library hosted its 3rd annual Derby Day fete as the 137th Kentucky Derby Run for the Roses unfolded at Churchill Downs.

The Southport party, according to Robin Jerrild, the library's special events coordinator, featured "19 tailgating groups, including vintage automobiles and even a John Deere tractor, each with its own spread of food and beverages.

In addition, she said, "The Shack is here providing Kentucky fare, including barbecued chicken, cornbread, coleslaw, briskets and sliders. Adjacent to that is a full bar donated by Diageo, with mint juleps as the special drink of the day."

A flat-screen television outside and big screen in the library's auditorium kept attendees apprised of all the action from the big race. A pair of horses was brought on site by the Fairfield Bridle Trail group. Finally, a 50/50 raffle allowed guests to select a favorite horse to win, place or show, for a cash prize.

A passing shower at the start of the event, which sent people scurrying under tents and umbrellas, yielded to bright sun. But the rain did not dampen spirits at all, nor the competitive spirit in evidence.

"Like many people who don't closely follow horse racing, I pick my horses not by odds but by name," said guest Kelly Kingston. "Dialed Up and Midnight Interlude look good to me this year. A couple of years back, that strategy paid off -- my horse came in second and I won some cash."

Under the food tent, Chris Gould of Southport said that this was the second year she was participating. "We picked a winner last year," she said. "Our money's on Archarcharch; our sleeper pick is Brilliant Speed, at 30-1."

"God Bless America and let's watch the ponies!" said Southporter Alex Christon, chiming in.

Deborah Webb of Westport, who was joined by friends at their own tailgate gathering, said, "This is a great way to keep alive the horse community and showcase horses, but also socialize with Pequot Library members and friends. My pal Anya Porter and I are getting behind Animal Kingdom to win." Anya's mother, Dorothy Porter, of Fairfield Bridle Trail, explained the connection between her organization and the library. "They give us two tailgate spots and 10 parking spots to provide both horses and riders in riding garb to enhance the event," she said.

About the event itself, Porter added, "The Derby is big, and though based in the South, it's really a national celebration. The library hosting it brings everyone together for a great springtime affair. It's like Halloween in the spring. How fun is that?"



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