



Community festivals fun and beneficial

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Next month, I'll be attending the Lexington County Peach Festival in Gilbert.

The Peach Festival is one of my home county's proud traditions. For nearly 60 years, tens of thousands have flocked to this small town on Independence Day weekend to pay tribute to one of our state's favorite summertime fruits.

I've always appreciated local community festivals, particularly those in the small towns of our state. The Rock Around the Clock Festival in Winnsboro, which takes place in the fall, is one of my favorites. So is Summerville's Flowertown Festival, which is held in the spring.

There's the Spring Water Festival in Williamston, the Harvest Day Festival in Inman, the Strawberry Festival in Fort Mill, the Pickens Azalea Festival, the Chapin Labor Day Festival, the Clarendon County Striped Bass Festival, the Festival of Stars in Ninety Six, the Country Corn Festival in Travelers Rest, the Rice Festival in Walterboro and countless other small town celebrations that I love to attend when possible. Most offer music, street dances, food, contests and arts and crafts.

But community festivals are more than just a fun time. They also serve an important purpose.

Local festivals draw communities closer, help neighbors get to know one another a little better and stimulate the local economy. They make lasting friendships by bringing people together.

They showcase local merchants, which is a particularly valuable form of advertising for smaller "mom and pop" businesses that lack big advertising budgets.

Because admission to these festivals is either free or low-cost, they offer the fun of a night on the town – and allow folks to get out of the house – without straining wallets.

Quite importantly, many of these community festivals also raise funds for charitable causes.

While a city is defined by its geographic boundaries, a community is defined by its people. Local festivals strengthen communities by connecting people and fostering goodwill among neighbors. They inspire community pride. They help remind us that our differences pale in comparison to the common bonds we share.

In a very real way, they help improve the quality of life for local residents.

These festivals are possible because of volunteers who put in countless hours of hard work – planning, putting up signs, distributing fliers, making phone calls – often for little recognition or thanks.

The next time you're at your hometown's annual event – whether it's a carnival, fair, parade or gala – take a moment to think about how it helps enrich your community's quality of life. And perhaps pause to thank one of the busy volunteers whose time, devotion and self-sacrifice make it possible.

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