

“Art in the Park” celebrates it’s 40th Anniversary at Marathon Park

Wisconsin Valley Art Association (WVAA) Chairwoman Mary Barthels, and co-chairwomen Sandy Diehl and Jan Pflieger organized the first Art in the Park. It was held the weekend after Labor Day, September 1976, at Marathon Park in the Exhibition Building. The first year, it was a non-juried show, “so that it included a wide variety of media from rock and metal sculpture, to crafts and jewelry, and works of the highest quality.” Art in the Park was held on the same weekend as the established Festival of Arts, and the Birds in Art at the Woodson Art Museum. Art in the Park was advertised as “displaying the collections of 62 areas artists under one roof”. The Central Wisconsin Antique Show was held in the Youth Building of Marathon Park on that same weekend.

Mary Barthels stated that “A wide variety of arts and crafts will be included in the show.”, with “representatives as far away as Iron Mtn, MI; Iowa City, IA; Green Bay, Hayward, Bayfield, Chippewa Falls, Eagle River, and many from the Wausau and surrounding area” per newspaper reports. The show featured “pottery, porcelain jewelry wax sculpture, batik, macramé, photography, oil, acrylic and watercolor paintings, pen and ink, charcoal, scratchboard, china painting, jewelry, rock carving, wood turning, quilling, weaving, tole, decorative painting, rosemaling, metal sculpture, wood carving and pastels.” There was an estimated 8000 people that attended the event.

The event “worked from the first year” Barthels said. We were filled up with exhibitors, and people wanted to sign up for the second year”. By 1986, the 11th year, the event featured the work of more than 125 artists and had spread to include the Exhibition and Curling Buildings.

The event became so popular, it became a juried event to be able to screen and limit the exhibitors to the available space. Art in the Park became a part of “Wausau’s Artrageous Weekend”, along with the Festival of Arts and Birds in Art, and currently draws an estimated 35,000-40,000 to the events. Art in the Park is held in the Exhibition Building and East Gate Hall of Marathon Park, and is limited to 120-125 exhibitors. It has always been held at Marathon Park, always on the weekend after Labor Day.