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Instead of selling pizza, children play games

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Southlawn Elementary School launches its first-ever Winter Festival this weekend, with Christmas-themed carnival games and indoor fun at the National Guard Armory. The event will run from 4 to 7 p.m. Saturday, with free admission and all games priced at 50 cents each.

The festival is a welcome alternative to the door-to-door fundraisers students conducted previously, said parent Nancy Koerner.

“The past few years, the kids were selling Little Caesar’s pizza,” she said, and while the local business partnership was something boosters appreciated, “it felt a little risky in today’s world to have our kids going door-to-door.”

Instead, students have poured their energy and time into setting up games, activities and decorations for the one-day festival.

“They’re pretty excited,” said Koerner. “Each class is in charge of a game, and they’ve been decorating the booths. This is something new to them, and it’s been a lot of fun already.”

Traditional carnival games like ring toss, fishing for prizes and musical games will keep visitors busy, while appearances by a Santa Claus at every booth and various elves will lend a holiday flair.

“We recruited Santas from the fathers, or the teachers’ husbands or sons,” Koerner said. School principal Gloria Quattrone avoided a padded red costume, but she will still make a decidedly public appearance.

“Mrs. Quattrone volunteered to let people throw Cool-Whip pies at her,” Koerner said. “That’s one of the games people can purchase tickets for.”

At the competitive game booths, children can win prizes, which parents selected with trendy popularity in mind.

“We’ll have those glow-in-the-dark rubberband bracelets,” Koerner said. “Right now, the kids love those. There are also lunch boxes and totes, pencils, fun stuff.” The festival will also offer a bouncy house with a slide and an abundance of carnival foods.

“We’ll be serving chili donated by Wendy’s, and hot dogs, cinnamon rolls, popcorn and drinks,” Koerner said.

While children bounce, munch and fling pies, their parents can browse the silent auction, packed with donations from local merchants. Among the offerings are oil changes from Safety Lane, car washes from Squeaky Clean, home decor from Scantlin's, service from Massages by Robin, motorcycle parts from Liberal Harley Davidson, a wreath from Burlap & Blossoms, and more.

"We're so thankful for the businesses that have supported our festival," Koerner said.

As Saturday approaches, the team of parents continues to transform the armory's industrial space to a winter wonderland.

"I spent last night cutting out a huge cardboard Christmas tree, and we keep making trips to the store to buy things that will make it look snowy," she said. "We're going to try our best to make it look really fun and special."

No matter how the decorations turn out, Koerner said her son, a Southlawn first-grader, is eager for the festival to begin.

"He's a Cub Scout, and we just got done selling popcorn door-to-door," his mother said. "I think he was just happy to not have to sell things again. But now, he's really excited about the festival."

Southlawn Elementary School's Winter Festival fundraiser will take place from 4 to 7 p.m. Saturday at the National Guard Armory. Proceeds from the event will be used to purchase school supplies and classroom items for Southlawn.

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