

# Pottery Festival ends



Wesley Beeson | The Sanford Herald

Visitors make their way around booths during this year's Pottery Festival at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center. Sanford Pottery Festival Director Don Hudson has confirmed the two-day event will not be returning in 2013.

## Community leaders consider new spring event

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The Sanford Pottery Festival, known for attracting thousands of pottery fans from across the state and region the weekend before Mother's Day, will not return this spring, according to festival director

and co-founder Don Hudson.

An informal mixture of business, political and community leaders met Wednesday afternoon to determine if Lee County, in light of Hudson's decision to end the event, would be able to support a comparable festival, according to Sanford Area Chamber of Commerce Chairman Tom Snell.

"For the last 10 years I have consistently said, 'No such event can be sustained in a community that fails to promote itself and all of its attractions throughout the year,'" Hudson said Thursday.

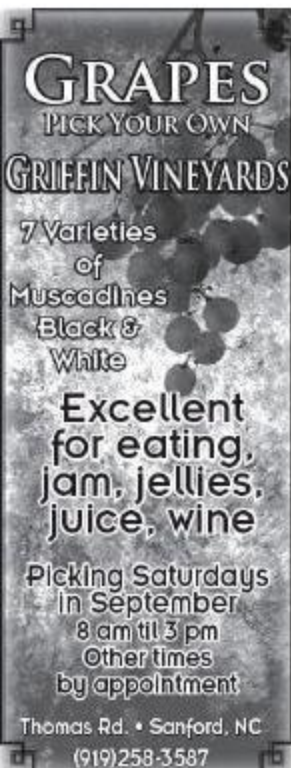
Since the inaugural Sanford Pottery Festival in 2002, Lee County business and political leaders have discussed tourism but never focused and carried

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# FESTIVAL

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

that discussion into action, Hudson said. The burden of shouldering the festival has become too great despite the benefits, he said, and has



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taken from his personal life and professional work at D.K. Clay Pottery. Hudson said he's had two heart attacks in the decade of organizing the festival and it is impossible to sustain the momentum against the odds stacked against him. It was time, Hudson said, to withdraw from the fray.

"I have to weigh what I can achieve through D.K. Clay with what I used to believe, and what I still believe, has always been possible for Sanford," Hudson said. "I don't see it any nearer after 13 years than back then."

The Sanford Pottery Festival has been described as the largest pottery event in North Carolina, attracting thousands around the Southeast and playing host to more than 110 exhibitors at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center. The festival was always meant to be a first step in promoting the arts within

the area and not the last step, Hudson said.

The Sanford community is one that aspires to greater things, Hudson said, yet every single one of the community's assets fight on an uneven playing field. Every surrounding community has a tourism bureau or an organization dedicated to promoting the area year around, but not Lee County, he said.

"No one event or group of dedicated people can carry that burden," Hudson said. "This community has many things that should be promoted all together and at all times."

The area is at least 10 to 15 years behind the rest of the state on where it should be in terms of promoting local treasures, Hudson said.

"I can't think of any one reason why someone should come to Sanford," he said. "But I can think of many reasons together as to why it should be

almost irresistible to tens of thousands of people to visit."

When Snell — whose wife, Renee, takes part in the festival as a jewelry-maker — heard the pottery festival was not returning to Sanford, he said he wanted to bring community stakeholders together to see if whether there was an interest in continuing in the tradition of an arts-related festival.

"I think the consensus was that, yeah, we need to do that," he said. "We can and need to do that."

The group will continue to meet in the upcoming weeks firming up concepts and logistics of a festival, Snell said, and eventually become a steering committee for the event. The festival may not focus entirely on pottery and instead highlight a variety of art-forms, he said.

"As word filtered, the Chamber got many calls," Chamber

President Bob Joyce said. "This is such a signature event for Sanford and Lee County, it's something we are known for across the state. ... We got lots of calls saying this is worth continuing in some form."

People will be concerned and saddened by the loss of the pottery festival, Joyce said, but the stakeholders are interested in creating a similar, high-quality festival.

"I do think there is definitely concern," he said. "That because the festival has such a great reputation outside of Lee County, that anything we do needs to be of the same quality and caliber as the pottery festival."

Joyce and Snell both reiterated nothing has been finalized, but both expressed interest and hope for a spring festival.

"We can't wait very long," Joyce said. "I don't want to leave the

impression we have time to work on putting together details. There has to be a decision to move forward fairly quickly."

Hudson said he will not be involved with any upcoming festivals, despite being solicited from other North Carolina cities and communities, and will focus on his professional work at D.K. Clay, which he owns and operates with fellow potter Kenneth Neilsen. Hudson said he wishes the group good luck in its endeavors to produce a festival.

If the committee is able to produce a quality event, Hudson said the group will run into the same problems of sustainability as he has.

Hudson has not made an official statement on the festival's departure and will begin the process of notifying vendors in the near future, he said.