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And there was light!

By Bonnie Obremski, North Adams Transcript

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Monday, April 28

NORTH ADAMS – Nearly 3,000 tourists swarmed the concrete banks of the Hoosic River Saturday night from about 7:30 to 11 for the city's first annual spring lights festival, surpassing local expectations and boosting local business profits.

"We basically started on a wing and a prayer," Mayor John Barrett III said of the event, after he mingled with crowds for about two hours. "For me, the art wasn't in the river; it was in the people who came here."

Artists and design professionals from around the globe contributed to the \$10,000 project that North Adams artist Ralph Brill proposed a year ago. Brill secured permits from the state and enlisted the help of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., to realize his vision.

Brill said he had originally hoped 350 tourists might marvel at the sculptures lighting up the city's flood control chutes. When thousands more showed up, he began envisioning next year's festival at five times the size.

"It's going to be twice as big, more exciting, with nice food," Brill said. "We'll make it a real festival – a five-day event."

A hot-dog vendor and an ice-cream truck were the only two food providers adjacent to

the light sculptures, but several restaurants a few

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8:30 p.m., and few flocked to the ice cream truck in 50-degree temperatures. As a result, some people in the crowd wished out loud there had been greater culinary options. There was also no music, something Brill had hoped to schedule but could not make happen because of the project's time constraints.

Erica Rano, 16, of Clarksburg said what a few others in the crowd also murmured — it was nice, but she had expected more.

"I thought they were going to do cool things with certain colors, making them come out in a way where you'd be like 'Oh my God! That's so cool!' That didn't really happen," Rano said.

The sculptures, designed by nine RPI students and by artists Inhye Lee of New York City and Rikayo Horimizu of Tokyo, Japan appeared to draw the largest crowds. The RPI work shone the brightest, as colors changed and reflected off suspended bridges of wire and cloth. Lee and Horimizu invited spectators to participate in a "Wishing Bridge" for which volunteers wrote down wishes on translucent tablets that were illuminated when a person placed a penny in the tablet's slot.

"One small kid wished to get more fish in his fish tank," Horimizu said, laughing as she hung the tablets across the bridge among other wishes, such as "I want a cell phone," "I want to be a grown up," and "world peace."

Festival goers had to explore dimmer sections of the river to discover some of the subtler work of other artists.

Emily Conrad and Jeffrey Galusha of New York City lured people off Marshall Street down a path of green glow-sticks until, suddenly, their installation became visible as a string of glow sticks emerging from the current below the flood-control-chute fencing.

Across from the Porches Inn, Jazmine Raymond, a Bennington (Vt.) College student, shivered alongside her installation, which involved a station where participants could hold a funnel to his or her ear to better hear the sounds of the river 12 feet below.

blocks closer to Main Street reported a surge in business during Saturday's dinner rush.

Moulton's Pizza employees reported a 15 percent increase in walk-in customers. North Adams Pizza Co. reported about a 25 percent increase and Taylor's Fine Dining a boost of about 50 percent. Taylor's chef Uel Sugg said his restaurant saw increased patronage also as a result of a family weekend event at Williams College.

The hot dog vendor closed his stand at about