

Crawds 'n Rods back for 11th year

Written by Judi Boland, Lawton Constitution

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ELGIN — Crawdads — also known as crayfish, freshwater lobsters or mudbugs — will make their annual appearance at the Crawds 'n Rods Festival on Saturday.

But probably not for long, because the tasty crustaceans sell out quickly.

Elgin Fire Chief Mike Baker said this is the 11th year for the festival and it has been growing each year.

“The first year we brought 200 pounds back from Louisiana, while this year we will be getting 3,400,” he said.

Volunteers go to their supplier in Louisiana the day before the event to make sure they are as fresh as possible, Baker said. Once back in Elgin, they are prepared with corn, potatoes, onions, mushrooms and Cajun seasoning.

“Last year we served at least 500 all-you-can-eat wristbands,” Baker said.

If crawdads are not your dish of choice, the fire department will also be selling hamburgers, hot dogs, hot links, nachos and other finger-licking-good food.

The food is not the only draw: Also on the schedule are a car show, a poker run, burnout contest and music starting at 10:30 a.m. There will be vendors selling a variety of items, including Crawds 'n Rods T-shirts for \$15 each.

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A carnival, complete with rides and games, will be operating Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and for the second year there will be two days of softball at the ball fields south of Sonic.

“We (the department) host the softball competition, which has also grown each year,” Baker said.

If music is more to your liking than listening to the sounds of car exhausts, Smokin’ Okies will take the stage playing mostly classic rock, with a little blues, and modern rock. The Garagemaholics will also be entertaining with their brand of music, and the day will end with the Jeremy Gray Band, which plays country music you can dance to.

Baker said each band will be performing 90-minute sets.

Baker said one of the more popular events of the day is the burnout contest in which drivers spin their rear tires, creating billowing smoke.

This year as last, the name of the winner of the 2014 Factory Five 33 Hot Rod, custom built by the Elgin Firefighters, will be drawn. There are 600 tickets being sold at \$100 each for the vehicle, which is valued at more than \$70,000, Baker said.

“We started late this year, so there will be plenty of tickets the day of the drawing,” he said. “Always before we have sold out before the event.”

Crawds 'n Rods averages more than 500 registered car show and poker run participants and countless numbers of spectators. All funds raised at Crawds 'n Rods support the purchase of fire prevention education materials for local school children. The children receive coloring books, backpacks, stickers, smoke detectors and much more.

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“Our annual budget covers operating expenses such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, equipment and gear, but it doesn’t provide for any fire prevention education,” Baker said. “We believe that fire prevention is extremely important and that it works.”

He said the department is very aggressive in its fire prevention program and provides information to the students with the \$10,000 to \$15,000 it raises every year.

Each October, during Fire Prevention Month, firefighters go to the local schools and present a hands-on education and awareness program for more than 1,000 children. The children also experience a life-like fire safety house that demonstrates the importance of having a family escape plan and are challenged to talk to their parents about smoke detectors and family evacuation plans.

“I get a lot of phone calls every year from parents thanking us after we go to the schools,” Baker said.

During the program the children will also meet Sparky the Fire Dog, a life-size mascot.

Because Crawds 'n' Rods has grown larger every year, Baker said, the department begins preparations for the festival in the fall and it all gives the department more opportunities to talk about fire safety.

