Written by Jeff Ignatius
Tuesday, 01 June 2004 18:00

The Left Bank Art League hopes to have a strong festival this weekend, making up for a poor showing last year. “If we get good weather, this should be a really good year,” said Bill Hannan, organizer of the Invitational Fine Arts Fair.

Last year, construction on various Quad Cities bridges and bad weather late Sunday made a big dent in attendance. Between 6,000 and 9,000 people came to the festival, Hannan said. “We’ve had it as high as 26,000 to 28,000,” he added.

Hannan estimated that the fair lost between 9,000 and 10,000 attendees who simply didn’t cross the Mississippi because of construction. He added that other events that same weekend reported similarly weak attendance.

But with bridge work mostly a thing of the past, Hannan expects a big rebound.

The 48th annual fair will feature more than 60 artists (about two-thirds of them returning from last year) and will be held Saturday and Sunday on the Coolidge school grounds, at 34th Street and Avenue of the Cities in Moline. The event runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days and includes food vendors and “laid-back” entertainment from guitarist Sam Schold.

The Left Bank Art League was formed in 1956 and has regular meetings monthly. It also offers demonstrations and lectures, as well as a weekly painting group.

Hannan, who has participated in the fair for 25 years, said there are some lingering negative effects of last year’s fair. Several artists who had been longtime participants wrote saying they wouldn’t be coming to this year’s event because of poor sales last year.

Even so, the Left Bank Art League fair has a strong reputation among artists. “The customer base at Left Bank Art League is willing to pay for good art,” said Connie Glowacki, a watercolor artist from Janesville, Wisconsin. Glowacki said that in addition to the cost of making her artwork, she has to pay for lodging and the three-hour drive. “I have to make money,” she said. That hasn’t been a problem with Left Bank, she said.

Glowacki heard about Left Bank through fellow artists and has been coming to the Quad Cities fair for more than five years. She’s 62 years old and started drawing and painting when she was 39. “I wanted to stay home with the children,” said the former teacher of how she picked up what’s now her full-time job.

Her watercolors are highly detailed, a function of her love of drawing and her use of a wet brush on dry paper. She said that her paintings “tend to look photographic.” (For a sense of her artwork, visit http://www.connie-glowacki.com.) The artist will also be doing a watercolor workshop in the Quad Cities for Left Bank from June 28 through July 2.

Hannan said the Left Bank Art League fair draws a lot of women in the 35 to 60 age range. Many of the artists, he said, also do other local fairs, such as Beaux Arts and Riverssance. This year’s crop of art will include watercolors, oils, acrylics, jewelry, pottery, wood, glass, and sculpture. Artists at the fair will come from as far away as Missouri, Arkansas, North Carolina,

and Florida.

Glowacki said artists at festival form almost a support group. “We’re having a party this weekend,” she said. “We just don’t know who will be there until we get there.”