

# One scoop or two? Or three?

20th annual Banana Split Festival in Wilmington

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



The Banana Split Festival takes place June 13-14 at J.W. Denver Williams Memorial Park in Wilmington

**A little more** than a hundred years ago, if you'd walked into a soda shop and asked for a banana split, at best you would have gotten an odd look and maybe a chocolate phosphate. Then along came Ernest Hazard, who, in 1907, held a dessert-creating contest at his ice cream parlor in Wilmington, Ohio to attract students from the nearby college during the winter slow season. During what I can only imagine was one of the most mouth-watering competitions of all time, Hazard created the banana split. For two decades, Clinton County has been celebrating Hazard's invention with its annual Banana Split Festival, the next of which is set to take place this weekend at the J.W. Denver Williams Memorial Park in Wilmington.

Wilmington does have a rival for their claim as the Birthplace of the Split. Latrobe, Penn., claims to have played host to the invention in 1904. The discrepancy remains difficult to resolve, but both towns keep it all in good fun.

"We have bantered back and forth in a friendly 'disagreement,'" said Debbie Stamper, Executive Director for the Clinton County Convention and Visitors Bureau. "We have agreed to disagree! I heard they are actually holding their first festival in honor of the banana split this year. I guess they know a good thing when they see it!"

And what a good thing it is! Of course, food reigns supreme at this street fair-style weekend, but loads of additional entertainment will keep the whole family amused. There will be a dunking booth, fish pond, pony rides and a petting zoo. Live entertainment will take place all weekend featuring Cheap Thrill, Ben Schaad, Funky G and the Groove Machine, Gary Hill, Sawgrass, Blue Steel, Brent Keith and Passion. A praise and worship with Robin McMillan, Ben Schaad and Katie Smith will be held on Saturday afternoon.

Of course, you will need to indulge in the festival's namesake. The Make-Your-Own Banana Split Booth attracts sweet-toothers of all ages, and it's a fun treat no matter how you put together your split. However, if you're a purist jonesing for tradition,

you'll want to be sure to include the following: a peeled and split banana; a scoop each of vanilla, chocolate and strawberry ice cream; pineapple, strawberry and chocolate sauce; whipped cream; chopped nuts; and a maraschino cherry – or two, maybe three.

**"At the festival, the era is represented with a classic car cruise-in and car show, live music from the era and the Banana Split Shoppe where you can make your own banana split."**  
- Debbie Stamper

Interested in seeing professionals put their own twist on a classic? Check out the creativity of the chefs at the Masters Competition on Saturday afternoon in the Pavilion. Each contestant will put together their own version of a split – the only restriction to their creative vision being they must include at least four original ingredients used by Hazard.

"The chefs volunteer to be in the competition, which has become quite competitive," Stamper said. "Everything from 'pizza splits' to gourmet renditions has been created in the past. One by one, they present their desserts to the judges where they are sampled and rated on taste, appearance and originality. The winner has bragging rights for the following year and gets to have a giant 'banana' wood sculpture on display at their restaurant."

In addition to food, games and live entertainment, there will be a Classic Car Cruise-In on Friday and a Car Show on Saturday. Cruise-in participants could win door prizes and one vehicle will be chosen as the "Banana Split Committee's Choice." The car show will be judged and trophies presented to 40 winners Saturday evening. The cruise-in is free, and there is a \$10 entry fee for the car show.

The simplicity and general analog qualities of the festival harken back to the beloved era of the 1950s and 1960s. Festival organizers have recognized the charm of this earnest period in American history and have derived benefit from it.

"I believe the era represents a time when things were simpler and music was universal among all age groups," Stamper said. "At the festival, the era is represented with a classic car cruise-in and car show, live music from the era and the Banana Split Shoppe where you can make your own banana split."

The Banana Split Festival had modest beginnings, but steady growth and expanded appeal now draws thousands every year.

"The first event was held in 1995 as a means to raise money for a new playground at the city park," Stamper said. "It was started by local attorney Judy Gano as a labor of love. The first event was held downtown, but had to be moved to the J.W. Denver Williams, Jr. city park in

subsequent years so they could handle the growth. So, this would be the 20th festival!"

*The Banana Split Festival will take place Friday, June 13, from 4 - 10 p.m. and Saturday, June 14, from noon - 10 p.m. at J.W. Denver Williams Memorial Park, 1100 Rombach Ave. in Wilmington. Admission and parking are free. For more information about the cruise-in or the car show, please contact Jim Burge at jim.srpm@gmail.com. For a complete schedule of events, please call the Clinton County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 877.428.4748 or visit bananasplit-festival.com.*



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