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Break in the Weather party is April 29 at The Anchor

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JIM DAYTON
Wednesday, April 19, 2017



GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

An entrant in the belly flop contest gets ready to test the icy waters of the Rock River during the 2014 Break in the Weather party at The Anchor in Newville.

◀ 1 of 2 ▶

IF YOU GO

What: 2017 Break in the Weather party

When: 11 a.m.-midnight Saturday, April 29.

Where: The Anchor, 718 Highway 59, Edgerton.

Cost: \$5

NEWVILLE—It started more than 40 years ago as a simple barroom wager.

It was the first day of spring, but the Rock River remained frigid. The owner of the then-Anchor Inn tempted several customers with free drinks if they went into the water.

Riding a wave of alcohol-induced confidence and the promise of alcohol-induced warmth, the customers waded out into the ice-cold waters—and the annual Break in the Weather party was born.

John Kinnett, The Anchor's current owner, estimates it was 1972 when that story took place, but he can't be certain. Since then, Break in the Weather has become more structured and more expansive, adding live music and attracting visitors from across the country.

But it still pays homage to its origins. Every year, the party hosts a belly flop contest for those willing to brave the cold water.

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Belly flop: 1:30 p.m. on the Rock River (weather permitting)

Music: Dan Reilly performs inside at noon; Audiodrives performs outside at 3 p.m.; Shotgun Jane performs inside at 3 p.m. and Madison County performs inside at 7 p.m.

Get there: Two passenger buses will transport people in the surrounding area to and from the party. Buses won't have a specific route, so those in need of transportation should call the bar at 608-884-7565 to set up a ride.

For more: Visit AnchorFun.com or search for The Anchor on Facebook

"When they first did it, they all just walked into freezing-cold water," Kinnett said. "That's how it started. The owner previous to me, he started the belly flop, and then we just continued that tradition."

Sometimes, belly flop participants turn the event into a spectacle. Several years ago, a woman who had recently gone through a divorce came in her wedding dress. With two of her friends who came in bridesmaid dresses, the three jumped into the water to cleanse their pasts together.

That was Kinnett's most memorable belly flop experience in the 21 years he has owned the bar. The contest has been an annual tradition, but this year's will be the first since 2014.

A devastating fire in August of that year burned the old Anchor Inn to the ground, forcing Kinnett to completely rebuild. The new bar, which is triple the size of the old one and also includes a banquet hall, didn't reopen until Labor Day weekend of 2015, he said.

The fire forced the bar to cancel the 2015 Break in the Weather party. While it returned last spring, the weather was the "absolute worst," and it wasn't safe to do the belly flop contest, Kinnett said.

But this year will be different, Kinnett said. He's optimistic, and he's hoping for temps upwards of 70 degrees.

"Mother Nature owes me one," he said.

The Rock River still will be cold, however. At Kinnett's last check, the water was 38 degrees.

Because last year's event didn't turn out, Kinnett is planning extra entertainment in 2017. Local acts Dan Reilly and Shotgun Jane will perform inside, as will the country group Madison County from Madison. Weather permitting, Rockford, Illinois' Audiodrives will hold an outdoor show.

The party also will feature promotional giveaways for T-shirts, beads and glow novelties, Kinnett said.

The Anchor sees heavy customer traffic in the summer months from area campers and boaters. The best part of the Break in the Weather party is it's often the first time Kinnett sees some of his seasonal customers as the cold weather comes to a close, he said.

People who grew up near Edgerton and have since moved away often plan trips home based on Break in the Weather's date. They come from as far away as Florida or California to reminisce over parties from years ago, Kinnett said.

Break in the Weather also brings plenty of business to surrounding bars and restaurants. Those owners often call Kinnett after the event to thank him for the revenue boost, he said.

The relationship works both ways—the other bars and restaurants promote Break in the Weather because they know the event will benefit everyone involved, Kinnett

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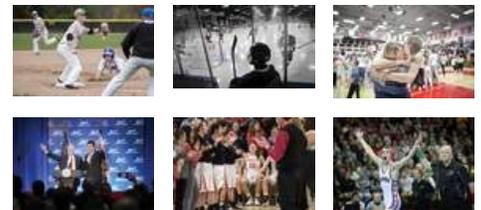

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said.

“It's right up there as one of the bigger events,” he said. “It used to be just The Anchor; now it's turned into Edgerton and Edgerton area.

“People go around and catch up with all the people (they) haven't seen.”

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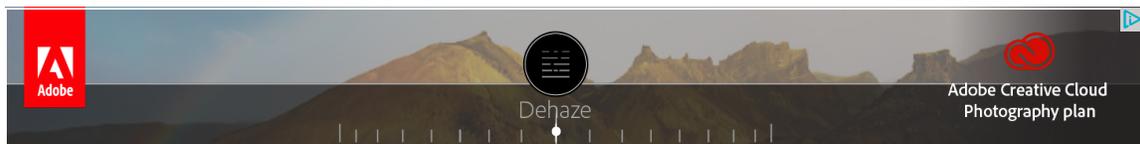
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