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# Easthampton Bear Fest raises \$60,000

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EASTHAMPTON - The Bear Fest auction Thursday drew 300 people, raised nearly \$60,000 and celebrated the successes of a festival that started and ended with a sense of community.

Every one of the 67 sculptures - 20 large, 14 small and 33 tabletop sized bears - sold. The bears left their logs in downtown Easthampton for new homes in business lobbies, backyards and private gardens.

"It's kind of bittersweet," said Briana Taylor, Bear Fest coordinator. "They demanded so much, like little kids. Now they're gone. It's only been one day, but it's going to be so different not seeing them up and down the street."

Artists wearing their Bear Fest pins, business owners and city leaders including Mayor Michael A. Tautznik, who presented a proclamation to Easthampton City Arts, the festival's host, attended Thursday's party. Tautznik also gave community service awards to Bear Fest organizers Taylor, Stuart Beckley and Ellen Koteen.

Some of the artists dressed like their bears. Jim Johnson, who created the "The Bearon," dyed his hair red and carried a cigar prop, while Silas Kopf, creator of "Aloha Bear," dressed in a tropical floral print suit and lime green shoes.

The event "really was like a Who's Who of Easthampton," said John Polak, who, with Taylor, tallied up Thursday night's results in the Easthampton City Arts office Friday afternoon.

"Hiding Bear," covered in glass leaves up to its face and a glass bumble bee on its nose, had the highest bid at \$5,050. Bidder Deborah Ritzer of Easthampton intends to decorate her garden with "Hiding Bear."

"It was really exciting and unexpected," said Crystal Popko, the artist. "The whole thing was really exciting ... to see someone wants to spend the money for the art."

The large and small fiberglass bears raised \$54,000, while the tabletop bears created by city schoolchildren raised an additional \$3,000 in silent auction. Online bidders contributed more than \$20,000 before the live auction Thursday, Taylor said.

"This was beyond our expectations," Taylor said as she entered auction data on the event Web site, [www.EasthamptonBearFest.com](http://www.EasthamptonBearFest.com).

Each artist gets 25 percent of his or her bear's proceeds. Art programs in Easthampton Public Schools and Riverside Industries each get 20 percent of the proceeds, and 35 percent goes back to Easthampton City Arts for future programs.



JERRY ROBERTS

Bear Fest bears - the small versions - sat lined up before the auction Thursday. All bears were sold, and many will find homes in public places.



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Though no longer adorning downtown city streets, the bears will still have a presence in the Pioneer Valley.

"Ginger Bear Man" will be mounted on top of freezer cabinets in Big E's Foodland; "Papa Bear & Baby Bear" will find a new home in the Emily Williston Library, a gift from Easthampton Savings Bank; "Aloha Bear" will join Riverside Industries; and "The Bearon" is expected to hang from the ceiling of Packard's in Northampton.

Next spring, "Gone Fishing" will return to its log in front of Nashawannuck Pond, even if the fish are still out of water.

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