

Chevy Court named best free concert series

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The New York State Fair's record-setting 2009 entertainment lineup on Chevy Court was recently named Central New York's best free concert series by readers of the Syracuse New Times.

Chevy Court, which hosted 24 shows by top-name performers like Sara Evans, Shinedown and MC Hammer during the 12-day-Fair, beat out five other free venues in the New Times' annual "Best of Syracuse" readers' poll.

"There was some pretty stiff competition this year, so that's quite a feather in their cap," said Art Zimmer, publisher of the arts and entertainment weekly.

Other nominated summer concert series included the annual Jazz Fest held on the Onondaga Community College campus; the New York State Blues Festival emceed by Dan Ackroyd; the weekly Regional Market Block Party; the twice-weekly Liverpool is the Place concerts; and the Hump Day series at Syracuse's Inner Harbor, which featured national acts like the Marshall Tucker Band and Foghat.

"This award means a lot to us because it means we succeeded in creating a concert venue that diverse groups of people could enjoy without breaking their budgets," Fair Director Dan O'Hara said. "Our goal was to give people more - and higher quality - entertainment on Chevy Court than they'd ever experienced before, and it is gratifying that so many people seem to appreciate our efforts."

O'Hara credited Triangle Talent Inc., which booked and produced both the Chevy Court and Mohegan Sun Grandstand concerts this summer, for putting together the eclectic group of popular entertainers that drew more than 150,000 people to Chevy Court for free shows. And he thanked Pinckney Hugo, the Fair's advertising agency for its work in promoting the shows.

This year marked the inauguration of a new, expanded format at Chevy Court. In the past, the same artist would perform two shows daily during the Fair's 12-day run. This year, two different artists performed - one in the afternoon and one in the evening - effectively doubling the number of big-name performers available to Fairgoers for just the price of admission.

The entertainers ranged from country music stars like Evans and The Oak Ridge Boys to classic rockers like Grand Funk Railroad and 38-Special. It also included several acts tailored to older people; teen star Drake Bell and other rising pop performers, and modern rock bands like Shinedown, which drew crowds that haven't been seen since Sonny and Cher packed the court in 1972. And it included a Chevy Court first - a cooking demonstration by celebrity chef Bobby Flay.

The Fair was formally presented with the readers' poll award at the New Times' annual "Best of Syracuse" party on Oct. 1. About 2,000 readers submitted ballots for the poll, which asked for "best of" suggestions in dozens of widely ranging categories. The New Times is a regional Arts and Entertainment newspaper with a weekly circulation of about 46,000.