

GOP says MusicFest was tone deaf on family and economy

Morin assails costs and a band's 'F bombs'

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BY GABRIEL H. GLUCK

Star-Ledger Staff

While Union County officials are calling the county's Hanna-abbreviated MusicFest weekend an "incredibly successful" event, despite the headliner B-52s never taking the stage, Republicans are condemning them for allowing a "family-oriented" event to include a rock group dropping "F-bombs" over the crowd.

Union County GOP Chairman Phil Morin, who attended the concert at Nomahegan Park, criticized officials in this Democratic-controlled county for not properly screening the performers.

He also said that if county officials do not come up with a full accounting of the cost of the concert, which officials put at \$600,000, half borne by the county, the GOP leader said he was prepared to go to court to force a full disclosure of the cost.

"I think it would be nice for the freeholders to be forthcoming about the cost, but if it requires dragging it out of them by legal means, we'll do it," Morin said. "It certainly won't cost us as much as it has to look at Corzine's e-mails."

The county's two-day fest made it through Friday night and all day Saturday, but with the whipping rains of Hanna closing in hours before the B-52s were to take the stage, the festivities were halted by 5 p.m.

"We had an incredibly successful event. The estimates were there were 20,000 people on Friday," said Union County Manager George Devanney. "Up until 5 o'clock on Saturday, the acts performed, people enjoyed themselves and overall we had a tremendous success."

An estimated 650 people participated in the walkathon and 5K run to benefit cancer causes, up from fewer than 300 people last year, he said.

Morin said that with the concert billed as a family-oriented event, he had problems with the lead singer of Everclear "throwing around F-bombs." The county GOP chair also took exception to the group dedicating a song with a title that contained offensive language to Republican presidential nominee John McCain.

"The county and the corporate sponsors should be embarrassed by the outrageous behavior of some of the bands, especially Everclear," Morin said. "This is sponsored by a public organization and to allow performers who are going to spew offensive language shouldn't be tolerated."

Devanney said that while the county did not condone language used by some of the performers, when the bands are booked, there is no research into their political leanings.

"We certainly do our best to offer family entertainment," he said. "Everclear is an extremely popular band -- there were 10,000 to 15,000 in the park who came to hear them. But there comes a point where there is artistic license where we have no control."

Morin also called upon the Democratic-controlled freeholder board to make a full accounting of the costs of the concert -- "the overtime for all the officers patrolling the parks, the cleanup and restoration of the park, certainly massive promotional effort for the event, and the compensatory time."

"How many employees are getting comp time as a result of their participation? There were certainly a lot of employees there," he said.

Morin went on to say that he didn't know how the event promoted the county. "It would be heck of a lot better if they spent a tenth of this money and held an economic development conference to show small and large businesses what advantages there are to relocating to Union County," he said. "There are a lot better ways in this economic climate to promote new business opportunities than a splashy concert."

Devanney countered that the employee costs associated with the event were worthwhile.

"We believe this event is good for the Union County economy and to showcase Union County pride," Devanney said. "We urge him (Morin) to read the reports on the impact that culture and the arts have on economic development -- and we have had economic development summits."

Gabriel H. Gluck may be reached at (908) 302-1506 or ggluck@starledger.com.