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## May Day Festival Garden revels in spring, earth

By Hilary Kraus

Staff writer

The photo opportunities were off the chart.

From snapping shots of the adorable little ones circling the maypole or having their faces painted, Sunday was a picture-perfect day as more than 1,200 people attended May Day at the Cape Fear Botanical Garden.

"It's neat," said Shalonzha Atkins, while her 4-year-old son, Makai, clutched his hand-made may basket bouquet. "It lets the kids learn about the environment. And there's not a lot of stuff you can do on Sunday for kids."

The first Sunday in May marks May Day, the garden's annual celebration of spring and earth.

Angela Dennis, marketing and development officer at the garden, said it was the idea of the late Marion Kennedy long before Earth Day and thinking green became in vogue.

"Most people want to get involved in it," Dennis said. "It's because it's a neat event. It's free, educational and it's outdoors. It's really unique because it's at the Botanical Garden."

This year marked the 10th celebration in an event that's grown to 26 activities that are spread over about 15 acres. More than 90 people volunteered, from high school students to Junior League of Fayetteville members.

Throughout the afternoon, adults and youngsters made their way around the garden paths, stopping off at the various stations.

"It's grown and matured over the years," said Finley Bryan, the director who has been a part of May Day since its beginnings.

While pony rides and making may baskets are mainstays, the celebration also recognized the military this year.

Dennis said May Day joined the newly organized 31 Days of Glory, Fayetteville's month-long celebration honoring the troops, veterans and their families. May Day added a stars & stripes wind mobile stations where kids created mobiles using patriotic symbols.

While the station kept busy, nothing could pull the kids away from Jake "the Snake" Martin and his 80-pound Burmese python.

"The younger they are, they have no fear of snakes," Martin said as a mob of children huddled around the gold and black snake.

Martin, retired military with Special Forces, brought 10 snakes with him. But it was the 12-foot constrictor Slither that got the most attention. And in the most photos.

"It's different," said Kaitlin Brust, whose family prompted her to pose with Slither.

After a few minutes, the 13-year-old was mugging it up smiling as the giant snake wrapped around her neck.

And after all, it does make a great MySpace photo.

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Staff photos pages 1B and 3B by Ashley Cross

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