Milk and cereal under the sky
Written by Andy Fitzpatrick
Jun. 9, 2013 | battlecreekenquirer.com

You can’t have cereal without milk.

Well, you can, but why would you?

Thanks to Prairie Farms Dairy, bowls of cereal were kept full of milk at the 2013 Cereal Festival and World’s Longest Breakfast Table Saturday.

Everyone knows breakfast food companies Kellogg’s and Post hand out boxes upon boxes of free cereal to festival fans, but Prairie Farms has been providing the milk since 2004, the dairy’s Regional Sales Manager, Gary Davis, said.

Prairie Farms is also celebrating 75 years in the milk business. They marked the occasion with free cake, education stations about the health benefits of milk — including the chocolate kind — and a chance to see some dairy cows up close at exhibits set up in the Burnham Brook Community Center parking lot.

“We try to connect the dots from the farm to your table,” Davis said. The company is based in Carlinville, Ill., but there’s a distribution center in Battle Creek.

Davis said it was important for the dairy to be a part of the communities it operates in, including 11 in Michigan. The festival crowd seemed to agree as people lined up to get into the dairy’s exhibit area and get some cake, milk and check out the cows.

Bas DeJong, a Hickory Corners dairy farmer with 1,800 cows, brought a few of his calves for young humans to see. DeJong is one of the farmers supplying Prairie Farms, which Davis said is a farmers-owned cooperative, with milk.

DeJong said there can be a gap between modern kids and knowing where their food comes from. He saw the Cereal Festival as a way to make that connection.

“It starts right here with baby calves and cows,” DeJong said. “The lights start going on. It is important.”

Kids were giving the calves water to drink with what looked like oversized baby bottles. They smiled and laughed as the cows drank the water, an uncommon sight in downtown Battle Creek.

“There’s no fear,” DeJong said. “There’s that nurturing instinct that they all want to be part of. We all have that.”

Fear was part of another event Saturday. High above the cereal — 15 stories, actually — Canadian rappelling company Over the Edge was back in Battle Creek helping area Boy Scouts raise money for at-risk youth and other programs.

People walking and driving to and from the Cereal Festival stopped for a bit when they saw people moving down the side of McCamly Plaza Hotel. Between Friday and Saturday, organizer Nate Thornton said there
were about 26 people signed up for the chance.

One of them was 15-year-old Ryan Bearndt of Mason. He was with the Boy Scouts' Troop 3 of Charlotte and said, shortly after hopping off the side of the building, that he's done it before.

Except it was never more than a couple of stories in the past.

“This was a little bit higher,” he said. He wanted to do it to help out the Scouts, an organization that he said helped him in life.

Bearndt didn’t seem to have any trouble descending, even during a bit of hesitation at the top, just after he stepped into open air.

“Just getting my feeling for it, wanted to see the view and saying, ‘Guess there’s no turning back now,’” he said.

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