

Plain and fancy hot and steamy, they fiddled away

By BARBARA STACK

Sunday, the Three County Fair hosted the fifth annual Hilltown Fiddlers Picnic and its four generations of musicians and fans. Plain and fancy, hot and sweaty, but mostly just plain hot, the competitors bowed and plucked their way through nearly 12 hours of serious competition and fiddle high jinks.

At about 3 p.m. announcer Wynn Faye asked the crowd, "Are you folks enjoying this fiddle contest here? Good, it makes those fiddle players work all the harder." The folks were enjoying themselves, the little juniors played like adults and the grownups played.

At 7:30 the contest moved to the grandstand for the final playoffs and winning performances by the youngsters, highlighted by a four-fiddle version of "Dueling Banjos" by the talented sisters Koeler and Maranchia from Westfield.

The field of nine in the Open Division stumped the judges who called a four-way tie and playoff. Pete Sutherland, a dance fiddler from Calais, Vermont, took home the cash prize and trophy.

The Senior Division saw some longtime rivals play it out for a good number of longtime fans. Wilfred Guilmette stepped off with first place — literally stepdancing as he fiddled in the spirited French Canadian tradition.

At 11 p.m. it was over. Tired folks went home humming, analyzing the performance of their favorite loser, and wondering if it's too late to take up fiddle playing.

It's never too late.