

Tall Ships Festival Cost Taxpayers Nearly \$2 Million



(07/27/06 -- RALEIGH) - State and local governments spent nearly \$2 million for a sailing festival in Beaufort this month, most of it on public transportation, according to preliminary estimates.

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A \$1.65 million appropriation by the state Legislature paid for a fleet of 130 buses, minivans and other vehicles to carry more than 238,000 people to three venues during the 4 1/2-day Tall Ships Festival.

The agency also paid \$200,000 for some musicians, historical interpreters and other performances over the July 4 weekend, said Department of Cultural Resources spokeswoman Maryanne Friend. Final costs were still being tallied.

"We did that to assure public access to the arts, culture and heritage of coastal North Carolina," Friend said.

The agency supports cultural and heritage events in communities statewide and has participated in other large events including the First Flight Centennial in 2003, held in Kill Devil Hills at the Wright Brothers National Monument.

The tall ships festival, hosted by The Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum, was a public-private partnership, museum director David Nateman said.

The Pepsi Americas Sail organization sponsored the maritime festival but public agencies provided security, venues and other services.

Every town department in Beaufort was involved in providing traffic control, emergency crews and other support services, and \$10,000 went toward the development of Olde Beaufort Seaport. Town Manager Terri Parker-Eakes said total expenses were about \$30,000.

Carteret County was involved in the 18-month planning process but didn't contribute financially.

The state Ports Authority provided the venue, estimating use of the Morehead City port at \$100,000.

Nateman said a majority of the costs were covered by sponsorships, private donations, ticket sales and other sources -- not state or local dollars. Still, the question of whether those sources will cover all the expenses has yet to be answered.

"We still have invoices coming in and going out, and the books are still not closed out," he said.

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