

In Our Shoes



An unexpected place for fun

You might not immediately put an art festival on your to-do list as a family, but the mom behind creating those festivals in the Chicago area has ideas to make them fun for everyone in your family, especially your child with special needs.

Amy Amdur, president and CEO of Amdur Productions and mom of two, says her experience working with children with special needs has helped her create a festival they would enjoy.

“Being a mom has given me a firsthand experience on what it is like to take a child to an art festival,” she says. As a result, she believes motherhood has made the festivals better.

Here are her tips for enjoying one of the 41 art festivals she is planning this summer:

► **Call ahead of your visit**, (847) 926-4300. Amdur says her staff will arrange special one-on-one experiences with artists at the event. “Artists want to share their art with all kinds of people and especially with children. We have the ability to create really major moving experiences for families,” she says.

► **Go early in the day.** Crowds are hard with children and harder still when you have a child in a stroller or wheelchair. If that doesn’t work for your family, go for the last hour of the festival.

► **Bring water and snacks.** Even though the festivals have food, hunger might strike at any time.

► **Check out the festival program and map online.** This will help determine which festivals might be the best size for your family.

► **Play games.** Games make the festival more interactive and allow parents to spend more time enjoying the art. Amdur suggests a “Color Hunt” along the lines of Where’s Waldo, or an animal or object hunt that appeals to your child’s interests. “It becomes a real treasure hunt,” she says. “It makes the festival a game.” She also has created an art festival bingo for families to do together. Bingo cards are available at the

festival or can be downloaded at amdurproductions.com

► **Mix it up.** Break up visits to artist booths with watching art demonstrations and taking part in the free hands-on art projects in the youth art area. Amdur says the art projects let everyone feel successful with art.

► **Follow up.** If the festival really sparks an interest, try out an art class or two.

“Art is non-verbal communication. Especially for kids with special needs, I think art is something that can touch them and that they can experience and enjoy,” she says. “This is a ‘typical’ family experience. ... Sometimes with special needs kids, there are enough challenges in life. It’s good to do the other things.”

