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University Circle, Gordon Square celebrations thrive as rain stays away

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Michael Heaton, The Plain Dealer

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Lisa DeJong

Trent Taylor, 15, helps prepare a float with the theme "Op and Pop and Things That Go Round!" before the start of the Parade the Circle in University Circle on Saturday.

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- One cultural event is a cherished civic tradition. The other is trying to become one. Both had successful Saturdays. Partly because it never rained.

Though ominous clouds hung low in the Cleveland sky throughout the morning and early afternoon, both Parade the Circle on the East Side and the Gordon Square Arts District Day on the West Side were spared thunderstorms that had been promised by the National Weather Service the day before.

At 11:00 a.m. with the temperature at a muggy 85 degrees, cars were already parked halfway through Martin Luther King Blvd. A license plate read KRE8IVE, and you had to be creative just to find a place to park. Folks wearing T-shirts, tank tops and short shorts -- some pushing baby strollers -- made their way to Wade Oval for the 21st annual Parade the Circle celebration.

"We had 70,000 people last year, and this looks about the same," said parade director Robin VanLear from atop her six-foot-high stilts as she directed costumed marchers. "We seem to have reached a critical mass with the parade, and it's a good number without being too crowded."

Though the humidity was oppressive, it didn't dampen the crowd's spirit as more than 50 parade entrants danced around the circle. Among them was a group called Books Open Doors to New Worlds featuring Amy Frank and Sean Hensley, who were married at 9 a.m. that morning at Holden Arboretum. The wedding party of 50 bused over to Cleveland to take part in the parade.

"This *is* our honeymoon," said Hensley. "Next year we're going to do something simple like go to Japan."

Another entry in the parade was The Phoenix, a 10-foot-tall bird on wheels made entirely of the clear plastic packaging from medical supplies. The bird's creator, is Sawson Alhaddad, an anesthesiologist from the Cleveland Clinic.

"It took a year to save all of these pieces of discarded plastic," she said. "I work in a suite that has seven operating rooms, so everybody helped me collect them".

Across town in Gordon Square, at West 65th Street and Detroit Avenue, Ryann Anderson squeezed out some acoustic folk jazz on a makeshift stage for a dozen onlookers. Gordon Square executive director Joy Roller said she expected the crowd to pick up at the first-time event as the East Side event wound down. A free shuttle took people back and forth.

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"We had to add another vehicle because the one we had was packed," Roller said. "We just want people from the East Side to find out that we're here and that we have art and culture and theater music and great food. We want everyone to discover us."

The hub of activity in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood was a temporary store called Made In 216. The double storefront space offered clothing, jewelry, hats and furniture -- all made in the Cleveland. The place was cooled with an industrial-sized fan, had a D. J. playing tunes and ice-cold beer on tap. Danielle Deboe organizes the bazaar twice a year to promote small Cleveland retail manufacturers.

"I live in the neighborhood and have another store across the street called Room Service," said Deboe. "It's an art-centric lifestyle boutique. We were packed in here last night. You couldn't move. As soon as the parade is over, we expect everyone to come over to Gordon Square and party late into the night."



+ Enlarge Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer

Trent Taylor, 15, from Hawkins School, prepares the school float with their theme, "Op and Pop and Things That Go Round!" before the start of the Parade the Circle in University Circle on Saturday. (Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer)

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dulynoted

June 12, 2010 at 7:05PM

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Was a great event...glad the rains held out...temp was warm but event was worth it as always!

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lakewood216 June 12, 2010 at 7:09PM

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Parade the Circle was awesome.

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ronmak95 June 12, 2010 at 7:11PM

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These two events just highlight the great things we have in Cleveland.

Our area has it faults, that's true. But it has so many other assets other cities are envious of, none the least of which are it's people!

Cleveland is such a great place to live!!!

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frustrated June 12, 2010 at 7:14PM

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Rode by and I wouldn't of wanted to be there. Why would I want to hang out on a corner and listen to a band. That's what the Rock and Roll Museum is!!

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lakewood216 June 12, 2010 at 7:30PM

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The Rock Hall consists mostly of fossils...didn't have a chance to check out Gordon Square today but it's sounds more fun (and chepaer) than the Rock Hall corporate rockers.

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dulynoted June 12, 2010 at 8:47PM

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There used to be a plethora of family events/festivals in this area. Parma used to put on a great Rib Fest every summer...that has gone away and if not people stay away because of the gangs and such that over run it. The Flats used to have "Kids Fest" every year. (I may be wrong on the name). But that too is gone. Even the Berea Fairgrounds and the County Fair have their "gang" problems. Little Italy has its problems also with gangs at its festival. Garfield Hts used to have one of THE BEST family five day festivals in NE Ohio for over 30yrs. But that too was soon put to a stop by the gangs coming to the park to fight their personal battles.

Its a shame that these gangs were allowed to close down such great family events. No matter how many police, security these above events had they were not enough for the garbage and sum who wanted to use these family public events for their war zone.

One can only hope that Parade the Circle is one that will stay safe, draw the hundreds of thousands of people and hopefully will never be overtaken by the gangs.

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lakewood216 June 13, 2010 at 1:08AM

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Parade the Circle was fine...*no* thug/gang folks.

I've never heard of problems from *anyone* regarding anything in Little Italy until your post.

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lakewood216 June 13, 2010 at 1:13AM

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Parma's fest is taking place right now in Parmatown this weekend....never heard of problems at past Parma rib fests in the past...ditto for the county fair.

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bella12345

June 12, 2010 at 9:21PM

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Duly noted

I am sorry that those events are gone and these areas certainly have their problems. I believe River Fest in the Flats ended for financial reasons. There are still many, many very positive family oriented celebrations and events that go on in the area though!

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worriedfromfaraway

June 12, 2010 at 10:55PM

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I attended this crowded, noisy, unpleasant event once. It does not address the real lack of integration -- in every sense -- of the haves and the have nots in this city. There are other ways to build bridges, support mutual artistic pursuits, and "open doors." Please correct the caption. It's Hawken School, not Hawkins School -- I suspect.

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lakewood216

June 13, 2010 at 12:01PM

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I did some searching on the 'net and didn't see *anything* (left or right) that mentioned any safety problems at the Feast of the Assumption in Little Italy....other fests, such as the departed East 185th...along with some other smaller fests on the East Side and the Near West Side, had some...but not the Feast of the Assumption.

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