

News Release

8/28/09

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Rock Island Labor Day Celebrates 25 Years

The Rock Island Labor Day Parade will be held on Monday, September 7, 2009 starting at 9:30 a.m. Over the past 25 years, the parade has grown into a popular event that averages 150 entries and draws thousands of spectators. This year's theme "#25: Silver Celebration" was chosen to honor the 25th year of the parade. Participants were encouraged to develop an entry around a significant event or special milestone. The arrival of a new family member, winning a competition or promoting a major accomplishment, celebrating a special anniversary year of a business, organization, or church – are all good reason to celebrate!

Staging for the parade begins at 8 a.m. in the area around Washington Junior High School. Beginning at 33rd St., the parade route travels west along 18th Ave., turns left on 24th St., and then turns right on 25th Ave., and disbands at Rock Island High School at 25th Ave. and 17th St. The parade route is approximately two miles long and takes about 90 minutes to complete. The parade fills the route completely from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m.

Parade organizers are excited about the number of musical groups returning to this year's line-up. The Western Illinois University Marching Band will be back for a 10th year, along with high school marching bands from Alleman, Rock Island, and Rockridge. The outstanding Rock Island Metropolitan Drill Team or "MetroSteppers" and the Blackhawk Bagpipers are also returning to the line-up. New this year is the German Band from Waterloo, IL. Parade entries include local schools, neighborhood groups, local businesses, non-profit organizations, antique cars and tractors, and sometimes just a group of people who get together to have fun. Rock Island has quite a variety show on parade.

Sponsored by the City of Rock Island

Mayor Dennis Pauley states, "The Labor Day Parade is just one way the City of Rock Island is able to give back to the citizens, and provides a fun way to celebrate a national holiday. We are pleased that twenty-five years later, the parade is still going strong with thousands lining the streets to enjoy it."

The Labor Day Parade Advisory Board, appointed by the City Council, plans the event every year. Costs are kept very low for participants, just \$5 for family or individual, and \$10 for businesses and organizations.

The Advisory Board is grateful for the tremendous help of the Rock Island Police and Fire Departments, the Public Works staff, and the Community and Economic Development staff for their protection, signs, clean and good roadways, and much other help.

Parade History

In the early summer of 1985, an announcement in The Rock Island Argus asked for anyone interested in planning events for Rock Island's Sesquicentennial (150th birthday) to attend a meeting at City Hall. The kick-off event was the first Rock Island Labor Day Parade, which was planned and hosted in just three weeks.

A task force of 25 volunteers created an Old-Fashioned Labor Day Parade with the theme "Celebrate Rock Island." Dr. Conrad Bergendoff and Mr. Birger Swensen led the first parade as Parade Marshalls. The 1985 parade had 68 entries, including the Rock Island and Alleman High School bands, and was thought of as a one-time event for the Sesquicentennial celebration.

The task force chose 18th Ave. as the parade route, since it had become the main traffic corridor in Rock Island. This first parade started at Washington Junior High School and ended in Longview Park. Records show that due to numerous donations, the first parade cost the City of Rock Island only \$232.21.

Due to the success of the first parade, city officials approved the parade as an ongoing event. In 1989, an official Labor Day Parade Advisory Board was created, appointed by the City Council, and consisting of citizen volunteers. In its third year, the Parade Advisory Board set up the current parade route, ending at Rock Island High School.

Parade Marshall

Since 1987, Rock Island's Citizen of the Year is the Labor Day Parade Grand Marshall. This year's Grand Marshall is a group of staff and elected officials representing Rock Island Township Relief Office.

Every year people in the community are nominated by their peers for what they do for the Rock Island community. Rock Island citizens are nominated in seven categories – Business, Professional, Education, Individual, City Employee, Organization, and Youth. An additional Honorary category has nominees who do not live in Rock Island but have contributed to the good of the community.

All winners are invited to ride in the Labor Day Parade as Marshalls. The overall Citizen of the Year, who is selected from the winners in the categories for Rock Island residents, is announced at that time as the Grand Marshall who will lead the Parade.

2009 Winners:

Business - Wheelan-Pressly Funeral Home – owner Steve Pressly

Professional- Italo "Lo" Milani – architect with Milani PC

Education - Michelle Lillis - teacher at Rock Island High School

Organization - Rock Island Township Relief Office

Individual - Robert Olvera Fout - project manager for Quad-City Freight and soccer coach

City Employee – James Fobert – Assistant Fire Chief

Youth - Colin Carstens – recent graduate of Rock Island High School

Honorary - Michael Oberhaus – Associate Superintendent of Rock Island-Milan School District

Volunteers

Volunteers are the core of the Rock Island Labor Day Parade, since they plan all events and activities connected with the parade. This committee loves the parade and commits to it every year. From seeking entries to planning the starting line-up, theme, and parade route, the group spends countless hours organizing the event.

On Parade Day, the committee is joined by more than 40 volunteer organizers who help participants find their places, bring in bands or schools at the correct place, and help get all entries started. At the parade's end, other volunteers help disband the parade, sending bands and schoolchildren and floats all on their way safely. Friends and family members volunteer their time just on parade day to support the event.

Two of the original committee members still active in planning the parade 25 years later include Chairperson Mary Chappell and Art Milton. Current Advisory Board members include Grace Shirk, Jared Vogele, Samme Montgomery, Bernie Klauer, and Adam Lynch. Current advisors to the board include Brandon Colvin, Nate Gibbs, and Bill and Edna Sowards. Earlier long-term members, though now retired from the Advisory Board, include Janice Berry, Gene Briggs, Ray Loquist, Donna Schoeck, and Greg Vogele.

In the end, it is the parade itself that keeps the committee coming back every year. Assembling the tremendous variety of entries happy to march for two miles, watching the smiling faces of children, waving back at families gathered together waving, seeing friends and family having a great time at the end of Summer, all make the parade worthwhile. Advisory Board members and volunteers ride in the Valley Construction antique truck as the last entry in the parade every year, waving at the thousands of people who line the parade route, with spectators and planners cheering each other in a special thank you for the day.