

## Independence Day at Ault Park

Published in *Hyde Park Living* magazine

The recipe was as follows: one parade, one timeless orchestra, one incredible fireworks display, and thousands of freedom-loving Cincinnatians. The locale: beautiful Ault Park, nestled between Mt. Lookout and Hyde Park. The end result: an old-fashioned, feel-good 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, complete with sparklers and funnel cakes.

This summer marked the 30<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that the Hyde Park Neighborhood Council has organized the event, presented by Richards Industries. The morning festivities began at 10:30 with the spirited kiddie bike parade. Clouds and drizzle didn't stop nearly 100 excited youngsters from showing up for the fun. Parents looked on as children—ranging in age from toddler to preteen—proudly promenaded their brightly colored bikes, trikes, and wagons around Ault Park's courtyard.

After the parade, families snacked on cookies and candy as the awards ceremony began. Prizes were awarded to nine participants in three different divisions: bicycles, tricycles, and strollers/wagons.

The parade is a yearly tradition for many, including 10-year-old Colin Larsgaard of Mt. Lookout. This is the fifth year in a row that Colin has been awarded the first-place prize for his flamboyantly decorated bicycle. "We come every year," says Ms. Larsgaard. "It's just such a fun day for everyone, kids and parents alike." Five-year-old Annika Holland of Hyde Park was all smiles, despite two broken arms suffered after a fall from a tree house. With her casts decorated in red and blue streamers, Annika won the third-place prize in the wagon division.

After the awards ceremony, kids received custom-made balloon animals from the clown and played games in the courtyard. No-one seemed to mind the rain. "We saw the weather forecast, but we had to do it anyway,"

says Frank McCormack of Hyde Park; his kids Liam and Maeve, ages ten and seven, look forward to the event each summer.

The evening festivities began at 6 p.m., when concession stands opened and families began spreading out blankets and chairs on the lawn. By the time Mayor Charlie Luken delivered the official welcome speech at 8 p.m., throngs of people were in place and ready for fun. Following a stirring flag retreat ceremony by the Air Force Recruiters of Greater Cincinnati, the Pete Metzger Concert Band took the stage, pleasing the crowd with classic compositions.

Bob McKeever, a Hyde Park Neighborhood Council member and coordinator of the Alumni Department at Withrow High School, has volunteered at the Ault Park celebration every year for three decades. “It makes me think of how America must have been at the turn of the century,” he says. “You’ve got fireworks, parades, games...kids, parents, grandparents...all generations come together.”

Indeed, the sense of camaraderie was almost tangible as groups of all ages mingled and enjoyed the evening. Plenty of food and drinks were available as everyone awaited the fireworks display. “It’s the best part of the whole event,” claims the Acker family of Mt. Lookout.

And, as usual, Rozzi’s Fireworks did not disappoint. Just as the orchestra wrapped up their finale shortly before 10 p.m., the spectacular show began. The crowd was riveted for the entire 20-minute exhibit, clapping and cheering for the unique displays.

All in all, the celebration was a huge success. Al Bocklet of East Walnut Hills summed it up: “Music, politicians, fireworks—what more do you need? There’s so much to enjoy, and there’s also a sense of security: everything is very safe. Just the ambience of the whole evening...it’s wonderful.”