

H-F Juneteenth Fest celebrates freedom

BY ERIC CRUMP

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You Matter 2 promoted the H-F Juneteenth Festival as the biggest event in the South Suburbs. On June 18 and 19, the numbers seemed to support the claim as people from around the Southland came together to celebrate freedom.

The two-day event began on Saturday, June 18, with a parade in downtown Flossmoor.

You Matter 2 CEO and Juneteenth curator Destiny Watson said the size of parade exceeded organizers' expectations, with 22 groups and more than 400 marchers participating. The main festival on Sunday, June 19, at Homewood-Flossmoor High School brought a crowd Watson estimated at about 3,000.

The crowd could browse booths of 145 vendors, and there was music, food, dancing and performances all afternoon.

The popular Jesse White Tumblers drew a big crowd to their performance, and the 40+ Double Dutch Club returned with their energetic jump rope demonstration. The club members even

got members of the audience to join the jumping fun. There were activities for families, too, including an inflated zip line, axe throwing and a twirling ride.

The "Say Their Names" memorial display was back for a second year. The display includes photos of Black people killed by racial violence, from Civil Rights era victims like Emmett Till and Martin Luther King Jr., to more recent losses like Philando Castile and Ahmaud Arbery.

"It's really important that we do this festival because of the history behind it," Watson said. "We not only get to honor our ancestors, but people get to say they live in a community where Juneteenth is recognized."

TOP RIGHT: The Juneteenth Community Choir, organized by Opal Ray and directed by Diana Harrigan, helps get the crowd in the spirit of the day by singing the Black national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

BOTTOM RIGHT: The first H-F Juneteenth parade heads north on Sterling Avenue before turning west on Flossmoor Road on Saturday, June 18.

Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle



Kalind Haynes,
Flossmoor



Precious Claytor,
Chicago



Carlton Gordon Jr.,
football director, H-F Kings



Izaak and Beth Ebeywa,
Homewood



Tracie Porter,
Country Club Hills

Celebrating Juneteenth for me is important because it was missed as far as the nation was concerned. I'm excited to celebrate it just like we celebrate the nation on July 4. I love the fact that the country now acknowledges it."

Juneteenth means not just freedom from slavery, of course, but this is also the first step forward for America to also free other people who are oppressed and to continue that on and on."

Juneteenth has been a special day in Black culture for some time. It's fantastic to see how it's broadened out and really become an American holiday. It's not just Black history. It's American history."

I have young people in their teens who are interested in knowing what's happening around them. I am here to be able to support them, to help them learn what Juneteenth is. In fact, we want to go to Galveston next month. That was the beginning of Juneteenth."

Izaak Ebeywa

Juneteenth to me is about freedom. It's a celebration when not only do we think about our ancestors ... but now we as a nation can celebrate freedom together. Juneteenth brings everyone together."