

Flossmoor's Zip Code Party was a treat for community

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Flossmoor Park was filled Saturday, June 4, with the sights and sounds of a community coming together in celebration: music, conversations, food, games, bikes and strollers everywhere, dancing and a whole lot of whiffle ball.

The excuse to party was the rare convergence of the date, 6/4/22, with the village's zip code, 60422. Tom Dobrez, president of Flossmoor's Future and lead organizer of the Zip Code Party, said the event fulfilled his hopes.

"I'd have to say that the 'party of a lifetime' lived up to its billing," he said in an email the following day. "The atmosphere was classic Flossmoor. Everyone who attended seemed welcomed, they were connecting with old friends while meeting new ones and the whole scene was just beautiful."

Bike the Gem

The prelude to the party was the annual Bike the Gem ride, which gives cyclists a chance to experience the route of the Hidden Gem Half Marathon, which will be run in September. The route is designed to showcase all of Flossmoor's neighborhoods and community assets, taking riders past schools, sculptures, parks and businesses.

The new feature this year was a shorter ride for younger cyclists. While most of the adults went on the 13.1-mile journey, kids with their parents and guardians took a 13.1-block ride that brought them to the finish line almost in conjunction with the cyclists in the long ride.

And everybody got to pass beneath an inflated finish-line arch, just as the Hidden Gem runners do, with Flossmoor's Future volunteers cheering them on.

As Flossmoor Trustee Brian Driscoll noted as he welcomed cyclists to the ride, "It's a tour of Flossmoor, not the Tour de France. It's not a race, so enjoy yourselves."

Cyclists stayed in a more cohesive group

this year, with Flossmoor police providing a lead escort to help manage the pace. That helped ease traffic disruptions as the ride passed more quickly as police temporarily blocked Governors Highway to allow riders to safely cross it in two places, at Flossmoor Road and at Braemar Road.

Immediately following the ride, cyclists were directed through the tunnel to Flossmoor Park on the east side of the railroad tracks, where GoodSpeed Cycle had a corral set up for bike parking.

Welcome to the party

The party officially got underway when Flossmoor Mayor Michelle Nelson was introduced by master of ceremonies Chogie Fields. Nelson was joined on stage by local leaders, including state Rep. Will Davis, 6th District County Commissioner Donna Miller, Flossmoor Trustee James Lofton, Rich Township Clerk Arlene "Sugar" Al-Amin and Rich Township Supervisor Calvin Jordan.

"Welcome to the epic party of a lifetime, the 60422. It's great to see all my beautiful friends and neighbors and residents. I love to see your smiles," Nelson said. "Coming together as a community is more important than ever now. I think the greatest of a community can most accurately be measured by the action of residents. You won't find better residents to help you when you're down and celebrate you when you're up."

She applauded the work of Dobrez and other Flossmoor's Future leaders, plus the village staff and trustees who all played a part in making the party happen.

Home Run Derby

Dobrez said he was delighted with the way the community came together to make the event work. One part of the event that struck him as special, though, was the whiffle ball home run derby coordinated by James Cheung and sponsored by Flossmoor Baseball and Softball. League games were cancelled for the day to make way for the party.



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle
People gather to listen to music, dance and enjoy each other's company during the "once-in-a-lifetime" Flossmoor Zip Code Party on June 4.

"It must have seemed like a major league production for the young participants," he said. "There were kids and adults shagging balls like the professional version of home run derby and there were roars when a ball cleared the fence." He guessed Cheung's arm was hurting for all the pitches he threw.

Cheung admitted his arm was a little weary the next day, but he, too, was pleased with the result of the contest with more than 100 players.

The home run derby had a steady stream of batters, from T-ball players to adults, so it just kept going, ending after about three hours. Village Clerk Gina LoGalbo and several Flossmoor police officers even took swings.

Trophies were awarded in age classes, plus \$20 gift certificates donated by sponsor Zarlengo's Italian Ice & Gelato.

"Overall, the Wiffle Ball HR Derby was a big success in that Flossmoor Baseball and Softball was able to provide an enjoyable experience on the diamond with kids of all ages with just a bat, a ball, and a dream of knocking one out of the park," Cheung said.

Green efforts

Dobrez and Nelson each referred with pride to the effort sponsored by the village Green Commission to make the event environmentally sustainable.

The commission connected with Collective Resource of Evanston to provide waste collection services and deliver it to the appropriate destination. There were three stations posted around the park, and each had three bins, one for recyclable material, one for compostable material and one for material destined for the landfill.

The goal, according to Collective Resource founder Erlene Howard, was to get more material into the recycling and composting bins and as little as possible in the landfill bins.

When food waste ends up in landfills, she said, it generates methane, "which is the most dangerous greenhouse gas there is."

Composting not only reduces methane production and increases carbon sequester but has other benefits, including soil rejuvenation and improved water and air quality.

"There's nothing bad about composting," Howard said. "Everything is better with composting."

Green Commission members Eric Turnquest and Hilary Barker were posted at the set of bins behind the VIP tent, and they said the service was going over well. They were encouraged by the amount of waste they were collecting in the recycling and composting bins.

"We're accomplishing the mission here," Turnquest said.

He said the service could be offered again at future events. Barker said a next step would be to invite vendors to adjust their packaging to increase the amount that could be placed in composting bins.

Flossmoor's anthem

After the main event, some guests moved to Flossmoor Station and Brewery for more celebration, with local musicians providing live music.

But before the main event ended, the new Flossmoor anthem, "Flossmoor, Once More" was played over the sound system. The song, penned by Dobrez specifically for the event, made a perfect way to conclude the once-in-a-lifetime event, Dobrez said.

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