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Party Time! Bring Your Mom

Whiteaker opens its streets to the masses

The Whiteaker Cocktail Society's "farcical" monthly meeting agendas contain items like voting for who made the best cocktail or planning the theme of their next party, says member Girin Guha. A couple of years ago, the society's frequent by-the-way parties eventually coalesced into one the whole city could enjoy — the Whiteaker Block Party. The third annual celebration of the Whiteaker neighborhood is drawing nigh, promising to focus ever more attention on that "other side of the tracks" part of Eugene.

Guha lives on 3rd Avenue, the party's epicenter, as do many of his friends. When the idea for a block party was floated, "it became truly a community thing," he says. "Artists were interested in creating ambience, posters, etc., and the art exhibitionism that Whiteaker is known for." Last year, the event attracted about 3,000 people, with more expected this year. "It's grown," Guha says. "Not out of scope but much bigger than we thought it would be."

The city of Eugene has welcomed the event, creating a special permit for the block party and sweeping the streets beforehand. Local representatives including Mayor Kitty Piercy, a Whiteaker resident, addressed the throngs last year. Block party organizers say they have ironed out kinks with equipment, supplies and scheduling that hindered the past two events, and they have also worked with the city to improve emergency services.

Whiteaker has long been a haven for artistic freethinkers, and the neighborhood has drawn a cadre of hip new businesses such as Nib, Off the Waffle, Olivejuice and Epic Electric Tattoo and performance venue. "Compared to the rest of Eugene, Whiteaker's been rising," Guha says. The neighborhood is "less dangerous, less seedy and more business friendly, which has generally been positively received," Guha adds.

For Ed Cole, the Whiteaker neighborhood is more than a collection of cute old houses and hip eateries. Though he's never lived in the 'hood, he knows plenty of people who do. "We have friends hanging out on their stoops all up and down 3rd Avenue," Cole says. "You can kind of drift around and touch base with all your old friends and neighbors."

Cole says he would attend the block party even if 3rd wasn't like a second home, just to get a true sense of the local flavor. "It's got a true artistic contingent of people," he says. "It's a great distillation of that other-side-of-the tracks Eugene."

Two popular area businesses, Territorial Winery and Ninkasi Brewery, bookend the block party perimeter. "Which is great," Guha says. "There's a draw to both ends of it, and there's stuff going on in between." In the middle, rough-hewn beer lovers rub shoulders with Eugene's polished wine community (or is it vice versa?),



TOM BODHI REEVES

Bad Mitten Orchestre

Whiteaker Block Party
 1-10 pm Saturday, Aug. 1
 3rd Avenue between Van Buren
 and Adams
www.whiteakerblockparty.com

and meandering paths lead to stages tucked away in unexpected places. The neighborhood is festive, and doors are open and welcoming. "The grander moments of connectivity," Guha says, happen in this way.

In the spirit of autonomy, participating businesses manage their corners of the party as they wish, booking bands that suit them and hosting events that are representative of what they do. After all, it's not just a party for Whiteaker residents. "It's totally open to people outside of Whiteaker," Guha says. "It's a showcase in a sense of this neighborhood, so we'd like to have people outside the Whiteaker come in and enjoy it."

Robin Fletcher does live in the neighborhood. She's not sure how many curious residents of the larger community actually visit. "The event doesn't seem to draw anybody who doesn't have a piece of their soul down here already — people who come to neighborhood restaurants, bars or stores, who live here, lived here at some time or who have friends who live here," she says. "But people who are afraid of the neighborhood, whether it's some vague reputation issue or the diversity of style and income, just don't seem to show up. So as far as the block party alleviating the Whiteaker 'stigma,' I doubt it has a lot of effect. I'm not sure I'd want it to."

Fletcher is unfazed by the 3,000-plus people who are expected to tromp past her door. "There is plenty of space," she says, "and so far, they have all been friendly and positive."

EW