

Bigger is Better

THE WHITEAKER BLOCK PARTY CELEBRATES ITS EIGHTH YEAR by Sarah Hagy

What started as a small crowd partying in an empty parking lot in the Whiteaker among amps and beer kegs has grown, in eight short years, into a neighborhood-encompassing celebration of community and unique Eugene culture. Featuring a couple dozen local bands, food and craft vendors, an art and kid zone, carnival games, a dunk tank, beer gardens and even a bike valet, on Saturday, Aug. 2, from noon to 10 pm — it's the Whiteaker Block Party (WBP).

A free annual event hosted by a nonprofit organization and launched by founders Chris and Zoe Gadsby along with the Whiteaker Cocktail Society, the WBP still runs as a three-person operation with details-man Jason Vanderhaar and an army of volunteers. Aside from the familiar faces, location and lively spirit, not much these days resembles the original Block Party. Ninkasi rose up in the original empty lot and has been a strong supporter in the enterprise's exponential climb.

This year, local beneficiaries become benefactors with a diversified sponsorship plan that will cover the ballpark of \$20,000 in expenses. Vanderhaar explains, "[The sponsors] don't even say 'Hey, we want you to do this'; they're just like, 'Here's some money to make your vision happen because it's awesome for us.'"



CHILD PLAYS MINI GOLF AT THE 2013 WHITEAKER BLOCK PARTY

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

For example, Izakaya Meiji opened on the day of the Block Party years ago, and the owner confessed to Vanderhaar that during his first year of business he prayed to make it to the next Block Party. Now it's one of the Whit's most renowned venues.

"Pretty much everyone comes to see what the Whiteaker is all about," Vanderhaar says. "Because it's not what it used to be; it's not the scary neighborhood. Now it's more like we've got the breweries, and we've got some wineries and a distillery coming in, but we're not just about booze. There's a lot more than just booze in the neighborhood." With each passing year, crowds in the thousands continue to find out what the Whit is all about.

Five stages and 26 local Eugene bands will liven the Block Party, not including the music provided by participating venues. For some variety, head halfway down 3rd Avenue to the purple house and the Spoken Word Stage.

This year the beer garden, selling local craft beer and cider, has moved out of the street into the parking lot across from Ninkasi. The gates are open to all ages, but ages 21 and up will be adorned with wristbands. Customers must first purchase a ticket from the beer ticket booth in the beer garden and then trade at the bar for a beverage. All proffered beverages will have one universal price, and the booth has been created to speed the process at the bar. Also, the WBP has professional security to ensure drinking remains in the beer gardens and not on public streets.

There's something for everyone, even the kids, with So Delicious offering free ice cream in the kid zone along with craft projects and art supplies.

To stay true to the spirit of the Block Party — volunteer-run, always free and no pay — according to Vanderhaar, Chris Gadsby plans to use any leftover profits from beer sales to push for a public restroom in the Whit.

Look for a giant 3D block at the entrance between Van Buren and Blair; it's the party's symbol. You'll know you're in the right place. ■

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