



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Spontaneous performances entertain onlookers at Last Thursday on Northeast Alberta Street.

Last Thursday

continued ▲ from front

Happy-go-lucky crowds have been a historical fact since Last Thursday's spawning, but so has the frustration of its close neighbors who have little choice but to join in the festivities or harbor indoors with earplugs until the last drunken bar-hopper falls asleep.

"You can imagine how some of the noise bounces down the street," said Officer Chinn.

One such neighbor, the wife of a couple living just off Alberta since 1972, says she can put up with the noise, but won't stand for public urination.

This anonymous resident says that after watching two drunken males relieving themselves in her driveway some Last Thursdays ago, which she admits looks like an alleyway, she watered them down with a garden hose. "Those two won't do that again," she said.

Living one house down from the main drag, this veteran witness shares a list of weirdness that has spilled onto her property over the years; drunks falling asleep in her yard, wooden stakes stolen from her peonies, fire spinning fireworks falling on roofs, and bands thrashing about late into the night.

Many of her neighbors share similar frustrations and would agree that the community-owned event that started 13 years ago by a group of local artists to promote the art galleries on Alberta Street began to spin out of control quite some time ago.

"When it started, it was supposed to be an art walk," she said, "but it's built up into one big party."

Tired of mayhem that lasted past the 10 o'clock official closing time, neighbors have argued for more control of the event while supporters defend the festival's organic and spontaneous nature. Others question the city spending money for police enforcement

and compare it to other community fairs which are held to steeper requirements.

When nobody seemed to want to take full responsibility or had the resources to do it, Friends of Last Thursday formed to oversee the event and help address the issues. In February 2010, Mayor Sam Adams and City Commissioner Amanda Fritz asked Friends of Last Thursday to take more responsibility for the event and expand its stewardship.

Since then, Rochelle Saliba, co-chair of Friends of Last Thursday, says the group has been unrelenting to their mission of "facilitating a safe and sustainable monthly public art festival that culturally enriches the community while fostering neighborhood respect."

The group is working to assume full financial responsibility for event costs. It has raised enough money to pay for this year's garbage bills, and plans to hold future fundraisers and find business sponsorships that will cover street closure barriers, private security, and port-a-potties.

"The biggest thing we've done is identifying the issues and implementing programs to meet and change the culture of the event without changing the event itself," said Saliba. The idea is to preserve the spirit of the event while taming some of the problems.

An ambassador program was created to foster respect among participants. Volunteers help vendors, answer questions from visitors, and make sure the city's safety codes are followed.

For example, ambassadors ensure that noise should not carry more than half a block or else a ticket may be issued for \$500. Fire spinners need permits. No open-containers or underage drinking is allowed. Vendors cannot block sidewalks or businesses.

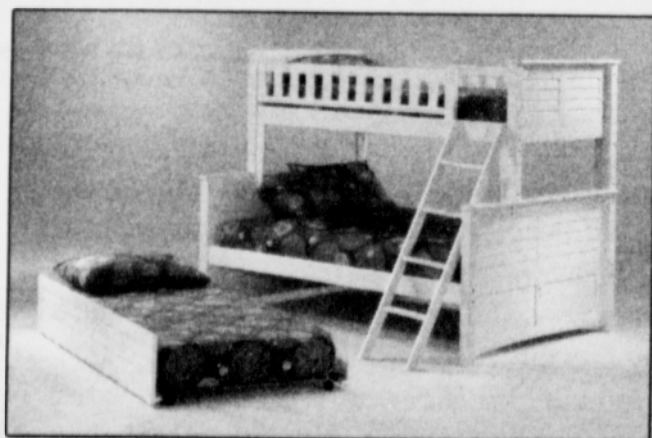
Since the group got involved, the outspoken neighbor said she's noticed a change for the better.

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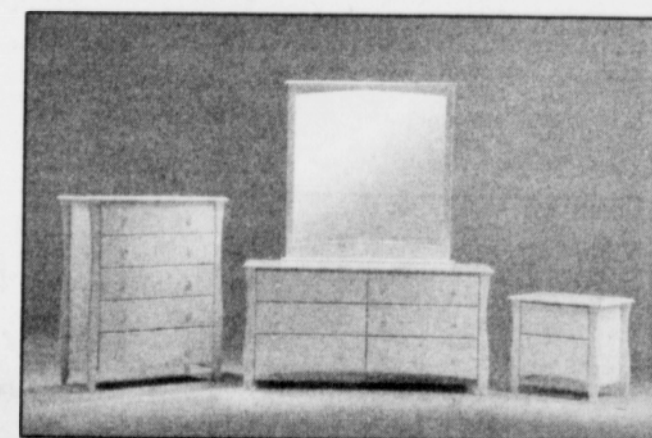
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