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Meeker Days to bring fun, family activities Three-day festival to attract 120,000 visitors from out of town

Staff writer June 18, 2014

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Back in 1939, the Meeker Days Festival started as a small event, meant to bring the community together and celebrate Puyallup's heritage.

Jump 75 years later, and the festival today is the largest street fair in Pierce County. The three-day weekend event will start Friday and run through Sunday, June 22.

"The core of the festival is free, family-friendly activities," said Meeker Days' manager Benjii Bittle. "(The festival) is like a restaurant menu — there is a lot of variety that appeals to different tastes."

Spanning the spine of South Meridian in downtown Puyallup from Main Street south to Fourth Avenue Southwest, children and their families will have their fair share of activities and rides.

Bittle mentions a few: interactive experiences such as mining for gold with the Carbon River Mining Company, theatrical performances in the Cutest Show on Earth, and fun rides, including the Zip Line, provided by Kent-based Clowns Unlimited.

"The Zip Line is back by popular demand," said Michele McGill, executive director of the Puyallup Main Street Association.

The Zip Line — offering a thrill for mature children and young adults — will run parallel to Pioneer Park along South Meridian in front of Puyallup City Hall.

"I think having a 150-foot-long Zip Line in front of city hall is really freaking cool," Bittle said.

Bittle, who is new to the Meeker Days manager post this year, said he has a passion for the arts. Something he focused on this year was enhancing the live music entertainment during the festival.

Sunday will be full of different musical styles. Starting at 3 p.m. on Sunday will be a Latino Fiesta concert and before that, from 1:30-3 p.m., will be Randy McAllister, a Grammy-nominated country and blues performer. The U.S. Navy Band called Deception Brass will perform at noon.

Throughout the three-day weekend, Bittle promises genres like Celtic, jazz, rock, disco and crooner.

Friday night will kick off with bluegrass-themed concerts on all the festival stages starting at 5 p.m.

On Saturday, the fourth annual Battle of the Bands will start at noon and go until 3 p.m. on the Main Stage on Meeker Street.

On the Battle of the Bands bill are three bands confirmed so far: Parys (pronounced Paris), The Limited and Talking Tafels, a German-contemporary folk band composed of students from Emerald Ridge High School who sing in German.

For bands to qualify, members must be 21 and younger. For the first time this year, Battle of the Bands coordinator A-Jay Rouse said the rule that at least one band member be from Puyallup has been removed.

"We wanted to encompass kids from all over the area, because we do get people attending the festival from all around the Northwest," Rouse explained.

In regards to the age requirement, Rouse said, "We want this to be a truly underage battle of the bands."

The winner of this year's Battle of the Bands will receive a paid opportunity to open for the 2015 Battle of the Bands.

"It's a great outlet for getting yourself known," Rouse said. "It's great promotion for any new band. The kids need anything they can get."

Rouse's son, Dalton, is lead singer and lead guitarist for the band Clear the Chaos, which last year won top prize at the Battle of the Bands. The rock quartet will perform the Main Stage this year, opening for the Battle of the Bands.

Immediately following the 2014 Battle of the Bands, Clear the Chaos' reputation blew up and members were asked to record a debut album. The album, titled "Brothers and Sisters," was released March 22 and is featured on Amazon, iTunes and Spotify.

This fall, Dalton Rouse and two other band members will start to pursue music degrees at Pacific Lutheran University.

"It's a really cool stage at the Meeker Days Festival and the sponsors for the Battle of the Bands have been really cool," Dalton Rouse said.

Bittle said the size and magnitude of the three-day festival has attracted national advertising. This year, Geico is a sponsor. Bittle said it's a big event with a local aspect that is appealing.

"I'm expecting 120,000 people this year," Bittle said. "We draw widely from a 50-mile radius, and many come from outside that. A lot of vendors are coming in from out of town and hotels are booked for that weekend."

If you go

The 75th annual Meeker Days Festival go from noon-9 p.m. on Friday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m on Saturday; and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Look for "Meeker Days Festival" and "Meeker Days Battle of the Bands" on Facebook. All day passes for select rides, which can be purchased on-site, are \$15. Otherwise, this is a free, family event. Visit puyallupmainstreet.com.

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