

Birth of the Cool: Miles Davis's 90th birthday celebrated in Alton

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON -Alton, Illinois, is the birthplace of "the Cool."

Innovative jazz musician, **Miles Davis**, whose "**Birth of the Cool**" compilation album was released in 1957, was born in a house on **Milnor Street** in Alton on May 26, 1926. While he only stayed in Alton for the first year of his life, Davis always acknowledged it as his birthplace. To commemorate that famous son, citizens of Alton raised \$150,000 to have a statue of the musician on Third Street in Alton's growing entertainment district. Davis's 90th birthday was celebrated at that statue Thursday evening.

Jody Basola, a **Miles Davis Memorial Project** Committee member shared an anecdote about Davis's birth before a short ceremony at the statue.

"One of the things I like is how his dad first came to Alton as a dentist and lived with Dr. Samuels, the first black physician in Alton," Basola said. "Then, about a year or so later, it was **Dr. Samuels** who came to their house and delivered him. His office was actually where the patio of **Chez Marilyn's** is now."

James Killion, a member of the project team spoke on behalf of the project at the small gathering of more than 25 people.

"I think Miles Davis was an innovator," Killion said. "He was special, not only was he a jazz musician, but he was able to bring so many genres together. His roots are in Alton, and it's important to the community. It's a really unique statue. I recently went to the the Chuck Berry sculpture in the Loop in U-City, and it's nothing compared to this."



The statue was sculpted by Peoria-based sculptor and jazz musician, **Preston Jackson**. **Miles Davis Memorial Project Co-Chair Pat Ackman** said Davis dabbled in art as well.

"He was described as the 'Picasso of Jazz,'" she said. "His favorite artist was Picasso as well. He also painted, and said Picasso was one of his biggest influences."

Alton Mayor Brant Walker also spoke at the ceremony, calling the community effort to bring the statue to **Downtown Alton** as "phenomenal."

"They did a phenomenal job raising funds for the recognition of the best jazz player ever," Walker said. "It was an honor to preside over the unveiling, and an honor to preside over its first birthday celebration."



Cupcakes with blue icing and music-note-shaped candies were also served to all in attendance by the Miles Davis Memorial Project team. A jazz homage birthday song was played by trumpeter, **Jim Manley**.

Team co-chair **Karen Wilson** said she helped bring it downtown to increase the popularity of the area. She's hoping more businesses will capitalize on its existence.

"We did it to bring something to the downtown area," Wilson said. "We're hoping businesses catch on that it's a gift to the city."

The Miles Davis Memorial Project started three and a half years ago, with the unveiling occurring in Sept. 2015. This year was the first year Davis's birthday was able to be celebrated at the statue.

