

Alton's First Annual Chinese Lantern Release is big hit

by Pat Schwarte, Account Manager
March 26 2017 10:05 AM











ALTON - The weather is fickle this time of year, ask Joe Bailey, owner of Universal Elements Photography. A month ago Joe thought that organizing a Chinese Lantern Release would be fun and bring the community together so he took to the World Wide Web and added an event to his [facebook page](#) and [RiverBender.com](#)'s Community Calendar.

By Saturday evening on March 25th, Joe said that 500 had expressed interest in his facebook event posting and that 78 had replied that they'd attend the release.

According to [China Highlights](#) there are multiple types of Chinese Lanterns; hanging lanterns used for light, flying lanterns used for special occasions, and floating lanterns used for celebrations. Historians believe the lanterns originated during the Eastern Han dynasty (25 – 220)

There are three components to traditional flying lanterns: nearly weightless paper, thin pieces of bamboo and a 'fuel cell' that is meant to burn from 5 to 10-minutes. The lanterns are approximately two feet tall with a circumference of about 18 inches. At the base of the lantern is a fuel cell made of waxy material that, when lit, provides light while heating the air inside of the lantern causing it to rise in the cool spring air.

Approximately 80 people attended what Bailey labeled as the first of what he wants to be an annual event. Nancy Clark and Brian Hancock of Alton heard about the lantern release on facebook. “We drove across the river to Captain Jim’s fireworks and bought six lanterns.” said Hancock. Clark added that she thought that lighting the lanterns was going to be tricky in the breezy park.

Also attending the first of what they hope becomes an annual event were Godfrey natives Nancy and Steve Goodman. The Goodman’s, who purchased their Chinese Lanterns on Amazon, brought their grandchildren Bristol and Julia, arriving at the park 3 hours before the launch of the first lantern. “The posting on facebook listed it beginning at 4:00 and ending at 7:00pm. We didn’t want to miss it.” stated Nancy. Fortunately the afternoon was nice and even mostly sunny, clouds rolled in and the temperature began to drop around 6:00pm. By 6:55 from up atop the bluffs at Alton’s Riverview Park, a line of dark clouds with sheets of falling rain filled the horizon across the river in Missouri. The approaching storm seemed to be sucking the air toward it making the wind blow toward the Mississippi and the storm. Bailey’s plan to launch at 7:00pm proved serendipitous because a light rain started to fall at 6:59pm.

Undeterred by the droplets, those who brought their lanterns began the process of lighting the fuel cells. The majority of the lantern-launchers being first timers, that, combined with a steady breeze that was becoming a light wind and sprinkling rain, made for major difficulties lighting the lanterns.

About 70% of the first wave of lanterns launched rose in a graceful drift skyward and toward the river heading for Grafton. The 30 or so lanterns that set sail into the darkening sky were beautiful to watch. The lanterns that failed were launched before they had enough warm air to propel it upward or were too heavy to rise because the paper had gotten wet. By the end of the release flattened lanterns marred the top of the bluff on the river side of the expansive concrete wall at the edge of the park. Wind shifts caused some of the lanterns to end up in trees.

As the crowd began to disperse, organizer Bailey said he was happy with how things turned out, given the sudden shift in the weather. “Next year I’ll begin planning the event much earlier and perhaps choose a different venue” he said as he began to climb the wall hoping to retrieve the lanterns that suffered from a failure to launch.

Universal Elements Photography

Joe Bailey

618-946-5288

BaileyJosehp83@yahoo.com



