

From backyard barbecue to full-blown celebration: Juneteenth celebrates 26 years in Alton

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
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ALTON - From its humble beginnings in Joyce Elliott's backyard in 1991, to a full-scale community gathering at Killion Park at Salu, Alton's 26th Juneteenth Freedom Celebration recognized history and influenced togetherness.

Juneteenth celebrations around the country commemorate June 19, 1865, day the last African American slaves in the United States were alerted to their freedom by Union soldiers. This notice came over two-and-a-half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Ever since, the day of freedom has been especially celebrated by African Americans in Galveston, Texas, and in other towns around the country. One of the Juneteenth organizers, Abe Barham, said that the committee is trying to make Alton's celebration as "Grand as Galveston's."

"It's not just a celebration of Alton's black heritage, it's a celebration of all of our history," Barham said. [Read more about Juneteenth in Cory Davenport's article about the event's origins here.](#)

Several informational listings were posted at Killion Park to describe some of the notable local and national figures in American history the civil rights movement, including the Tuskegee Airmen brothers from Jerseyville, The Little Rock Nine, Martin

Luther King Jr., famous baseball player Jackie Robinson, Frederick Douglas, boxer Muhammad Ali, Booker T. Washington, and more.

Members of the local health care community, including representatives from OSF St. Anthony's Health Center, Alton Memorial Hospital, Safari Dental, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Dental Medicine, Madison County Health Department and the Madison County Mobile AIDS Van participated the event's health fare, providing education, health screenings and items to members of the community free of charge.

Activities for the entire family were available at the annual celebration for free, including a children's play area, face painting, a rock climbing wall, dunking booth, bounce houses and more. A DJ, dancers, jazz musicians, poets, thespians, praise dancers, singers and story tellers and others provided entertainment for the day's event. Food and other items were also available for purchase.

View photo gallery here:





[Cory Davenport also contributed to this story.](#)