



Full circle after a 15-year wait: Pietown Gospel Festival coming to Rock Spring Park

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - After 15 years, Greg Gelzinnis and the Riverbend Community Gospel Choir will see their dreams of playing Rock Spring Park in Alton come true.

The Pietown Gospel Festival, which is a collective community effort spearheaded by The Drug Free Alton Coalition and Greater Alton Faith Community, outgrew its usual location in the parking lot of Main Street United Methodist Church, where it has been held for the last two years. Gelzinnis, who is one of the festival's organizers, said he had always envisioned it being at Rock Spring Park as a way to put Upper Alton on the map and to provide Rock Spring Park, which is in a state of revitalization, with an anchoring event to be hosted there every year.

Gelzinnis said he wanted the event to be the third event hosted by Community Celebrations, Inc., which already hosted a Christmas and New Year's event at Rock Spring Park. In fact, he said the Riverbend Community Gospel Choir was started, at least partially, to play that festival, which was sadly cancelled.

"It's taken about 15 years for it to come full circle for the choir to perform in Rock Spring Park," he said. "It was designed and destined to do so."

This year, the choir will perform Saturday afternoon from 2:45-3:15 p.m.

The festival itself will last from Friday evening at 6-9 p.m. and will begin again Saturday morning at 11 a.m. before ending at 9:30 p.m. Saturday. Besides the Riverbend Community Gospel Choir, performers from across the region, from Southern Illinois to the Chicagoland area, will take the stage.

Gelzinnis said he was excited to be hosting the Community Gospel Choir of St. Louis Friday evening from 7-7:45 p.m. as well as the Shalom Next Generation Choir of North County from 6:30-7:15 p.m. Saturday. A complete list of artists and times can be found by clicking the "artists" tab at www.pietowngospelmusicfest.com.

The event itself is free, but food does cost money. Gelzinnis said festival fare such as pork steaks, quarter pound hot dogs, grilled corn on the cob and "ice cold" watermelon will be provided at "economical prices."

"You're not going to have to pay \$8 for a bottle of water," Gelzinnis said. "It's not that kind of festival food."

There is no traditional seating at the upper athletic area of Rock Spring, where the festival is set to be held. Gelzinnis advised people to bring blankets and lawn chairs to enjoy the music.

A kids' play area will be provided by Abundant Life Community Church, and will include games for children as well as a bouncehouse.