

Oktoberfest once again marks St. Mary's German heritage; festivities run Friday through Sunday

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Oktoberfest patrons enjoy the fun and
ambiance of last year's event at St. Mary's Church.
This year's gathering begins Friday and runs through Sunday.
Thousands are expected to attend once again this weekend.

Each year, the Oktoberfest event at Alton's St. Mary's Catholic Church is one that families plan their entire weekend around. This Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the parish will mark its German heritage again.

The St. Mary's Oktoberfest has a little something for every age from young children to teens and adults of all ages. About 600 St. Mary's parish and school volunteers take part in it from Thursday to Monday to set up, run and tear down the event. Some of the finest German beer made is available at the Oktoberfest to celebrate the parish's German heritage. The Oktoberfest officially opens at 6 p.m. Friday and continues at 1 p.m. Saturday and noon Sunday. At 1 p.m. Saturday there is an official keg opening on the parish grounds at the corner of Henry and Third Street in Alton.

"It is fantastic to see the turnout every year and great to watch everyone come out and have fun and enjoy each other's company," Erin Ventimiglia said. "We have been so lucky everyone stays on our committee. All the key players are still there and everyone just jumps in and does what they have to do. If someone leaves, they are fantastic about teaching the next person the job."

This year, a mechanical bull has been added in the array of activities to go along with inflatable displays for children. Another addition is a new teen center, a suggestion by the Rev. Jim Walther of St. Mary's Catholic Church.

The Oktoberfest Auction will also offer many different items including a private party with The Glendale Riders that will be auctioned off Friday night.

"We have things for the 2-3-year-old all the way through adults with German beer and our wine garden and a lot of live entertainment and auction Sunday evening," he said.

The Rev. Walther said the Oktoberfest event at St. Mary's is something the parish fell into during its 150th anniversary celebration in 2008.

"We were looking for one big fundraiser and how we could make the 150th anniversary special and someone came up with the Oktoberfest," he said. "We tried it before, but this time we said, let's make it big and it kind of grew from there. Young and old participate in some way, shape or form. It is a parish celebration."

Walther is excited about having the new teen zone behind Suddes Hall with age appropriate activities for that age group. There will be large screen televisions available for people to watch the baseball playoffs and Walther said he hopes the St. Louis Cardinals are still alive in the hunt.

“We have to start somewhere to reach out to teens and find them a place during Oktoberfest as well,” Walther said.

Carolyn Simansky has coordinated publicity for the Oktoberfest since it started and is renowned for her efforts in area media.

She is ecstatic to perform her services each year to direct publicity.

“A lot of what we do stays the same, but we do try some new things every year,” she said. “We discuss what we are doing early in the year and at a breakdown meeting at the end of the Oktoberfest. The mainstays of our entertainment – The Glendale Riders and Back In The Saddle have been with us since the beginning. We have a good lineup of jazz, country and rock. Our \$10,000 sweepstakes raffle is very popular. Tickets can be obtained at the event or at the parish office and will be drawn at 8 p.m. on Sunday.”

People come from all over the region and beyond for the Oktoberfest.

The St. Mary’s Oktoberfest food is raved about each year as organizers cook with a huge German skillet.

“We have German sausage, potatoes and sauerkraut mixed together and we also have fair food frankfurters and bratwurst. One booth has corn on the cob and loaded baked potatoes and jumbo turkey legs. We have added some German desserts – Bavarian cream puffs and German cookies.”

St. Mary’s Church and School benefits from the proceeds. Classrooms have been remodeled and many other changes have been able to happen because of the dollars raised.

Other items available at the auction include an evening on the rooftop of the Simmons Law Firm where someone can bring 30 guests to enjoy the view of the Alton riverfront, a holy evening to join Father Jim and his loyal staff for a cocktail and dinner party at the home of David and Teresa Bartosiak. Ryan Gentelin of Gentlin’s on Broadway will prepare the dinner. Another is a cruise from the Alton Marina for six couples. Others are a hand-crafted rocking horse by John Schwegel, a two-day fishing trip and St. Louis Cardinals’ green seats and a private suite for a Cardinals’ game for 18 people.

The sweepstakes raffle includes the \$10,000 main prize, followed by \$5,000 second prize; \$3,000 third prize; \$1,000 for fourth and fifth prize and \$500 prizes for sixth through 10th in the drawing. Tickets are \$25 each; if you buy four, you get one free.

The Mass schedule includes:

Saturday, 5:15 Mass in the Church

Sunday, 6:30 a.m. & 8 a.m. in Church

Sunday, 11:00 a.m., Anniversary “Mass in the Grass” at

Garfield Park at 6th & Langdon

(For this, bring lawn chairs). Note: There is no 6 p.m. Sunday Mass.

Live music is set on two stages. This is the schedule:

Friday

Glendale Riders, 7:00 – 11 p.m.

Saturday

St. Louis Czech Express, 1p.m. – 4p.m. Planet Boogie Band, 7p.m. – 11p.m.

Sunday

Big Shake Daddies, 12:30 – 4:30 p.m. St. Louis Czech Express, 12:30 – 4 p.m. Harman Family Band, 4 p.m. – 6 p.m. Back in the Saddle, 6:30 – 10 p.m. Also, Basket Raffle and Games of Chance.

For more, contact St. Mary’s at 618-465-4284 or visit www.stmarysalton.com or For more, visit www.stmarysoktoberfest.com