



'Labor Of Love,' This Juneteenth Extra Special For Alton Community Activist Abe Lee Barham and Grandpa Gang Friends

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
June 21 2021 3:18 PM



ALTON - This past week is one Alton's Abe Lee Barham will never forget. For years, he has been an advocate for Alton and attempted to improve the region and lift its younger population to greater heights. The Juneteenth Celebration Saturday was probably the most special one Barham has ever participated in as a volunteer and leader of the festival.

Parades, picnics, and lessons in history were offered throughout the U.S. on Saturday to commemorate Juneteenth the day after Congress, President Joe Biden, and Illinois

Governor J.B. Pritzker created it as a federal and state holiday to observe the end of slavery.

President Biden on Thursday signed a bill creating Juneteenth National Independence Day. Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of freedom to enslaved black people in Galveston, Texas, two months after the Confederacy was surrendered. It was about two-and-a-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in Southern states.

Recently, Barham's Inner-City Gardening Project on Dooley in the Alton Housing Authority area drew attention. Barham has worked with the Alton Housing Authority and Theodora on the innovative program for youth to grow vegetables in the city and even earn \$10 an hour. For years, Barham coached in the Alton junior football league program. Barham was nothing but smiles with his usual Juneteenth outfit at Saturday's celebration at James Killion Salu Park in Alton.

"This one on Saturday was the largest Juneteenth Celebration we have ever had," Barham said. "The weather held up for us to see a mixture of the crowd we are very happy about. It is overwhelming and enlightens my heart about everything that has happened. It makes me feel good."

During the event, Barham pulled members of the Grandpa Gang in attendance together for a special recognition photograph. Barham said he couldn't be more proud of what those giving men do each year to prepare Christmas Wonderland at Rock Spring Park in Alton and their yearly community donations.

Barham describes all his community activist work as "a labor of love," and the new Juneteenth National Independence Day is something he and many others in Alton and the area have fought for over the years.

"I am glad I stuck with it for the past 29 years," he said.

