

Guest column

Traditions Weekend something to be proud of

As the Steubenville Convention and Visitors Bureau wraps up its fiscal year, I was reflecting upon the successful Traditions event of this summer and would like to share a little history of the beginnings of Traditions and thank those who help make it a success.

Prior to 2002, our three major festivals of the time, the Dean Martin Festival, the Old Fort Steuben Festival and the Grecian Food Festival held by Holy Trinity Greek Church were held on separate weekends in June. Mayor Dominick Mucci asked the three festivals to join together on one weekend for Ohio Gov. Bob Taft's visit for a dedication of a plaque honoring the newly founded Ohio holiday, Dean Martin Day which celebrates Dean Martin's birthday. The coordinators of the three events were a little unsure about holding the three events on one weekend, but Mucci assured them that all would be well.

The following year, Ohio's bicentennial, Mucci founded the bicentennial committee and asked each of the festival coordinators to sit on the committee. All three coordinators agreed that the festivals should be held on the same weekend. It was at that point that the convention and visitors bureau was asked to assume facilitation of the bicentennial committee. Each festival would coordinate its own events and then meet bi-weekly and weekly as the festival drew near to make sure each knew what the other had going on. The convention and visitors bureau acted as a clearing house to advertise and promote the events and as a contact to relay needs for in-kind services from the city.

The bicentennial weekend was a resounding success. Our community enjoyed a weekend of events and



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entertainment. The festivals reported their best turnout in recent memory. All of the festivals' coordinators and volunteers worked seemingly around the clock to make the weekend a success. The bicentennial committee, in conjunction with the Greek food festival and the Old Fort Steuben Festival, raised thousands of dollars to advertise the event and pay for a stunning fireworks display at the Fort Steuben Park.

In the afterglow of the bicentennial, there was a general consensus that the festivals should continue as a combined event weekend, and thus the Traditions weekend was born. With the approval of the mayor and the board of directors of the convention and visitors bureau, the bicentennial committee became the Traditions committee, facilitated by the convention and visitors bureau.

Each year following, the Traditions Festival has grown. In 2004, Peggy Zende of Anna-Kay's Unique Fashions came up with the idea of a downtown block party and personally solicited funds from downtown merchant to decorate Fourth Street with balloons, flowers and benches. She brought in street vendors and turned North Fourth Street into a

carnival. Anyone who attended the Traditions Festival this past summer was delighted with the fun atmosphere the expanded downtown block party provided. The block party was coordinated by Zende, despite her hectic schedule. Prior to the 2005 Traditions weekend, Zende, along with her family and friends, weeded the tree wells along Fourth Street and planted flowers at her own expense.

Our 2005 Traditions Festival was joined by the Juneteenth Celebration. The Juneteenth Celebration is a result of the vision and hard work of Duane and Fannie Jennings. It celebrates every American's basic right to freedom. The Juneteenth Celebration enjoyed an outstanding success.

Also joining us this year was the Cruisin' to Care Car Show. Thanks to Marc DeSantis and the Family Service Association for adding another dimension to our celebration.

The Thursday prior to the Traditions weekend, the Traditions committee coordinated a litter collection in the downtown business district. Volunteers included Rose Angelica, Barbara Wilinski, myself, Donna Hrezo, Mucci and the help of the boys and girls of the justice center juvenile community service program. Special thanks to Bernie Ravasio for single handedly cleaning up the mini-park. I counted seven bags of trash and weeds that were removed from the park. Wal-Mart Super Center graciously donated sandwiches and water for the litter clean up volunteers.

Thanks to the Old Fort Steuben Board of Directors, the Holy Trinity Greek Church and the Steubenville Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors, which donated a total of \$3,200 to the Traditions Committee to pay for advertising of all

the events. And thanks to the members of the Traditions committee whose faithful attendance at the Traditions meetings and volunteer work helped bring all of this together.

Thank you to the Greek Food Festival organizers for sharing your heritage with us through authentic old-world cooking and entertainment. The Greek Food Festival is truly a labor of love for them.

Thank you to the Old Fort Steuben Festival, which reminds us of the sacrifices of the pioneers and soldiers who envisioned this community and opened the Northwest Territory to settlers. Planning for the Old Fort Steuben Festival begins a year in advance and relies upon the generosity of sponsors and grant funds to bring this increasingly popular event to our community.

Thank you to the volunteers of the First Federal Land Office and Jefferson County Historical Museum who selflessly donate their time and energy to providing a door in time to our local history. Their efforts stem from a true interest in the history of our community.

Thank you to our local service organizations, the Rotary Club for refurbishing the Stanton statue, for making a donation to the Dean Martin Committee and for the volunteers to line up the Dean Martin parade; and the Lions Club for lining up the Dean Martin parade last year and for lining up the Steubenville Christmas parade every year. Thanks to the Kiwanis Club, which worked in conjunction with the Jefferson County Historical Society and SVRTA to pay for the signs for the shuttle bus that moved visitors from event to event. Thank you to Rose Angelica who works very hard at making the Dean Martin Festival better every year. Deana Martin is gracious

enough to join us each year for the festival and not only brings celebrities with her but also brings national attention to our city through Regis Philbin. The Dean Martin Festival is a part of our local heritage and we are honored that so many of his fans join us each year to celebrate his life and recognize his achievements.

Thanks to the media, which completely outdid itself in complementary promotion of all the Traditions festivals.

And finally, thank you to the City of Steubenville and its employees for providing in-kind services such as employee overtime for additional street sweeping and clean up, blocking off streets for events and the parade, electric drops for the festival vendors, additional police protection and the shuttle bus just to name a few. All of our festivals benefit by having the events on one weekend. Dean Martin fans have a plethora of activities to choose from during the Dean Martin event down times. Our local festivals have the benefit of additional visitors from out of town. We, as a community, have the opportunity to share our culture and traditions with visitors who in turn can spread the word about what a great community this is and all we have to offer. The benefits can extend beyond the festival weekend.

Each festival is planned and coordinated separately. However, by joining together on the same weekend they enjoy a symbiotic relationship that makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Our Traditions weekend is a shining example of what a community can accomplish when we all work together.

(Wood is the executive director of the Steubenville Convention and Visitors Bureau)