



ERIN McCracken / Courier & Press From left, Gavin Gillihan, 5, Clayton Mason, 5, Caeden Mason, 3 and Michelle Mason wave to people in the parade as they watch the parade go by and wait for candy to be thrown at the Annual Labor Day Parade in Princeton, Ind. on Monday morning.

Labor Day parade



1 of 8

PRINCETON, Ind. — Rhonda Agnew remembers attending the annual Labor Day Celebration parade since she was a child. Now she takes her children to the event, which this year was held Monday and started at Main Street in Princeton and ended at the Gibson County 4-H fairgrounds.

"It's a tradition in our family," Agnew said as her 6-year-old son, Jurrien, ran to catch more candy.

"I remember this since I was as young as him. It's still a nice event."

"It's a tradition in our family. I remember this since I was as young as him (6-year-old son, Jurrien). It's still a nice event."

Rhonda Agnew

Monday marked the 123rd annual Labor Day Celebration, which rotates among Evansville, Princeton and Boonville each year. The lineup ranges from a demolition derby and motocross to gospel singing, car and talent shows, a tractor pull, queen contest, a parade and the official Indiana State Picking & Fiddling Championships.

Attendance for the event peaked at 75,000 in 1949. From 1950 to 1992, the celebration alternated between Princeton and Boonville, with Evansville added in 1993. For about 30 years, until 1980, the United Mine Workers sponsored the event.

Charlie Wyatt, president of the Labor Day association, said theirs is the largest celebration in the United States after New York and Chicago.

"Today is just a gathering of organized labor, honoring men and women who labor; not just unions, but all who labor," he said.

"It's just to honor our local men and women.

"We think that we have the best labor in the world. We know we have the best labor in the world. You give us head to head, we'll compete with anybody that you have. It's great to be back in Princeton ... we're tickled to be here."

There were more than 100 groups represented at the parade, and many of them were also taking a stand on the current health care reform debate. Many of the floats had signs that read, "Health care for America NOW" and "Health care can't wait."

Workers from Whirlpool, which announced two weeks ago that it will be closing its Evansville plant in mid-2010, were also part of Monday's parade.

Among the members of the Local 808, was Bill Robertson, who was leading a chant about American jobs being shipped overseas.

"We're concerned about health care, and you're going to see it all through here. We believe that health care should be for all; it should be a right," Wyatt said.

"Terrorism to us is economic terrorism. These CEOs that have nothing but greed on their minds are taking American jobs out of this country, making a product and putting it back in this country for Americans to buy, and it's not a nickel cheaper."

But for most of the onlookers, especially the children, the day was about community, family and collecting as much candy as possible.

Milt and Jamie Westlund watched and helped their sons, Iver, 2, and Mitch, 3, collect candy being thrown from the different floats.

The family spent much of their weekend participating in the activities, and Monday's parade was the finale.

"We're glad we have jobs and the unions have helped the pay scale in a lot of places," Milt Westlund said.

"We always try to support them whenever we can. I always love to see how many people participate. ... The number of people that march always amazes me."