

Thousands gather for Labor Day celebration

By Gavin Lesnick (Contact)

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Photo Gallery

LABOR DAY PARADE

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"I truly believe that our country is what it is because of working people — not necessarily all union, but working people," he said. "They create the wealth of our country. We deserve the celebration; we deserve to have our day once a year."

That day came Monday as thousands of onlookers lined Petersburg streets for the holiday parade. It marked the final event of the 122nd annual Labor Day celebration, a four-day affair that travels to different Tri-State locales each year. It was last in Petersburg in 1965.

Gowen marched alongside members of United Mine Workers Local 9926, one of about 100 entries in a parade that snaked through downtown, shut down Indiana 57 for three hours and featured union members, floats, high school bands, pageant queens, politicians, antique cars, clowns, fire departments and much more.

Brenda Vincent, vice president of the Labor Day Association, said the parade — and the whole weekend — is the culmination, fittingly, of a lot of hard work.

Keeping it going each year is important to reflect the meaning of the Labor Day holiday, she said.

"This is our time to celebrate and say 'Hey, this is our relaxation, this is our fun, this is our weekend and we're going to do it to the hilt,'" she said. "... Everybody loves it. As long as people come, we'll have it."

They were there in force Monday.

Parade-goers gathered, some with lawn chairs and blankets, at points along the route: Ninth Street on the city's east side, down Main Street and west along Pike Avenue into the Pike County 4-H Fairgrounds.

Becky Hensley-Howard staked out a viewing spot with family members. She danced along with high school bands, judging their performances as they passed (Evansville's Mater Dei High School was the best in the early on, she said.)

Hensley-Howard, of nearby Velpen, Ind., said the parade put a deserved focus on labor and brought an unusual dose of excitement into the area.

"It's awesome," she said. "Nothing ever happens in Petersburg, and this was great."

A few blocks away, Angela Leathco of Winslow, Ind., watched the parade with her husband, Rick, and their 8-year-old son, Judah.

She enjoyed the variety of marching bands while Judah enjoyed picking up candy thrown from passing floats.

But being there was about enjoying the day and respecting its meaning, Angela Leathco said.

"The country was built on unions, and we need to support that," she said. "We need to remember the people that came on before we did."