

## Grove Fest celebrates St. Louis culture

By WILL HOLSTON

Last Saturday, from noon to midnight in the Grove neighborhood of Forest Park Southeast, the first annual Grove Fest was held. Sponsored in part by the *Riverfront Times* and, of course, the St. Louis favorite Anheuser-Busch, this new event celebrated all of the food, art and fun of the area. The Grove Fest, held in a blocked-off section of Manchester amidst houses and assorted bars, boasted a couple of music stages, an artist's village, booths of local businesses and plenty of food and drink to enjoy. The street was swarming with families, couples and dogs. For the 21 and over crowd, there were even roller derby girl exhibitions and a grape-stomping competition.

In the artists' village, a small off-shoot of booths set up by local business owners, Chris Sabatino sold temporary airbrush tattoos to advertise his store, Gus' Fashions Downtown, a 35-year-old institution located on Tucker specializing in graffiti style shoes and apparel. Across from him, festival goers were encouraged to help finish painting a large mural of a dragon, a refreshing splash of color on the

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# Grove Fest pays homage to St. Louis art, music, architecture and citizens

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block. Set nearby, and at various other locations throughout, music stages featuring local artists representative of the city's soul. Artists like Lamar Harris, a 30-year-old jazz musician who just put out his second album, and got the gig through his inclusion in the *Riverfront Times*' music showcase.

Beneath the surface of all the food and music, however, this festival is part of a bigger picture. Anne Townsend, a local business owner selling from one of the booths lining the street, gave voice to the overall point.

"I'm not here because I'm going to make any money," she said. "My husband and I bought and fixed up a condemned house 20 years ago in this neighborhood, and we have always been supporters of the area and the city."

As with many neighborhoods in St. Louis, the Grove started out in the 1850's as a bustling, urban environment brimming with various different types of housing and family run businesses. The shops along Manchester served as an important commercial district for people in the area.

However, as the urban areas of St. Louis began to decline, the Grove suffered as most of the business owners left, leaving abandoned, historical buildings behind. In the past few years, though, things have begun to look up. Local businesses are returning and an exciting new era is beginning.

If one looks around once thriving areas of St. Louis, there is an emblem to look out for on old architecture. The emblem, a depiction of two eagles with the words "Restoration St. Louis" inscribed on it, marks a building that has been bought up by local philanthropist Amrit Gill and his company, Restoration St. Louis, Inc. Started in 1990 with the rescue of a house in University City, the company has grown from Gill and his wife to a corporation with more than 100 employees and

over 1000 buildings throughout St. Louis. The company has been responsible for the renovation of places like the Moolah Temple and lofts in the Coronado Place, investing a total of over \$125 million in city renovation.

"Once-neglected husks of great monuments from a bygone era live again with exciting new uses ranging from loft apartments and restaurants to movie theatres and bowling alleys," according to the company's website.

The Grove neighborhood is no different. Looking around past the vendors and derby girls on roller skates, many of the old buildings in the area bear the eagles, who promise to breathe new life into the Grove. Of course, things like this festival are necessary in order to bring more attention and economic growth to the area during its revitalization.

At a booth near the exit, tables were lined up selling small pottery. Abyme, the woman in charge of the booth, works for South City

Open Studio and Gallery for children, an organization dedicated to providing free art classes for kids and senior citizens throughout the South Forest Park area. The pottery for sale benefited the organization whose goal is to join people together through artistic expression.

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In essence, that's what the Grove Fest is all about. Sure, it was full of good eats and soulful music, but that doesn't change the fact that a thing like this festival can't happen without the support of people and organizations from all over St. Louis working to bring people back to those areas that desperately need it. Hopefully, the festival can grow in years in conjunction with the neighborhood around it.

Of course, if all of this sounds a bit too serious, there was also a rollerblading drag queen named Zoom handing out fliers.