

Organizers set to roll out plans for Port Harley event

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Rock the Harbor planners will ask city to close streets, use marina lot for Aug. 30 fest

Organizers of Port Washington's Rock the Harbor — an Aug. 30 festival that dovetails with Harley-Davidson's 110th anniversary celebration in Milwaukee — said plans for the event are falling into place with a little more than four months to go, organizers said.

"We're in the process of booking the entertainment. We do have sponsors. We do have vendors," organizer Cathy Wilger said, noting the planners hope to announce the main act in the next couple weeks.

Organizers plan to meet with city officials next week to go over plans for the festival, which was endorsed in principle by the Common Council last year. However, aldermen still need to formally approve the plans, including street closings, and issue the appropriate cabaret and liquor licenses.

The festival, which has been a year in the planning, is patterned after the Community Street Festival.

Wilger said organizers envision closing Franklin Street from Jackson Street south to Grand Avenue and Grand Avenue west to Wisconsin Street.

In addition, they plan to close Washington Street from Franklin Street to the marina and reserve city parks from the bluff area of Upper Lake Park to the coal dock, she said.

Smaller stages would be set up on either end of Franklin Street, with the main stage at the marina, Wilger said. The marina has agreed to close the launch ramps that day to accommodate the festival.

Although she would not identify potential bands, Wilger said the organizers are looking primarily at country acts.

The fact that Harley-Davidson's Milwaukee event, which runs from Aug. 29 through Sept. 1 at the Summerfest grounds, has booked such acts as Aerosmith and ZZ Top for Aug. 30 doesn't faze the organizers of Rock the Harbor.

"They can only have 18,000 people see the entertainment," Wilger said, adding that the Aerosmith concert is an additional cost for people while Rock the Harbor is a free event.

"With a potential 500,000 bikers coming to Milwaukee, no, we're not worried at all," she said.

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Along the streets and between the stages, vendors will set up booths.

“We will have a huge focus on Port Washington businesses and organizations,” Wilger said. “The majority of the vendors who have registered so far are from Port Washington.”

Organizers expect the festival, which will run from 3 to 11 p.m., will attract 15,000 to 20,000 people over its eight-hour run, Wilger said.

The Ozaukee County Administration Center parking lot off Main Street will be dedicated for motorcycle parking, she said.

“You can get a lot of bikes in there. We know the motorcyclists are going to want to park downtown,” she said. “If people come downtown, they’re going to see a lot of bikes everywhere.”

Festival organizers have also been talking to the owners of other lots in downtown to see if they are interested in providing dedicated parking to cyclists, she said.

Rock the Harbor, a partnership between Port Washington Main Street and Suburban Harley-Davidson in Thiensville, will be listed on Harley-Davidson’s website.

Rock the Harbor will have a built-in audience of sorts. Wilger said the Holiday Inn is almost sold out for the four-day Labor Day weekend because of the Harley-Davidson celebration in Milwaukee.

“People from all over the world come to this event, and when they come here, they go out. They don’t just stay in Milwaukee,” Wilger said. “This is their vacation. They ride through the Kettle Moraine and along the lakeshore.”