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LET THE VIBES BEGIN

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

Campers set up shop, music starts on opening day

By **SEAN SPILLANE**

Staff writer

BRIDGEPORT — The camping crowd arrived on a steamy Thursday for the first day of the Gathering of the Vibes and spent most of their time doing one of two things: setting up their sites or trying to beat the heat.

The scene at Seaside Park in the afternoon, on the main concert area and around the

campgrounds and food courts, was one of festivalgoers relaxing in any available shade they could grab as temperatures neared the 90s. It was a stark contrast to last year's Vibes, which opened on a cold, gray and rainy day.

There were no noticeable traffic woes getting into the park in the afternoon, nor were there any major snafus once the four-day event was up and running. Ken Hays, the owner



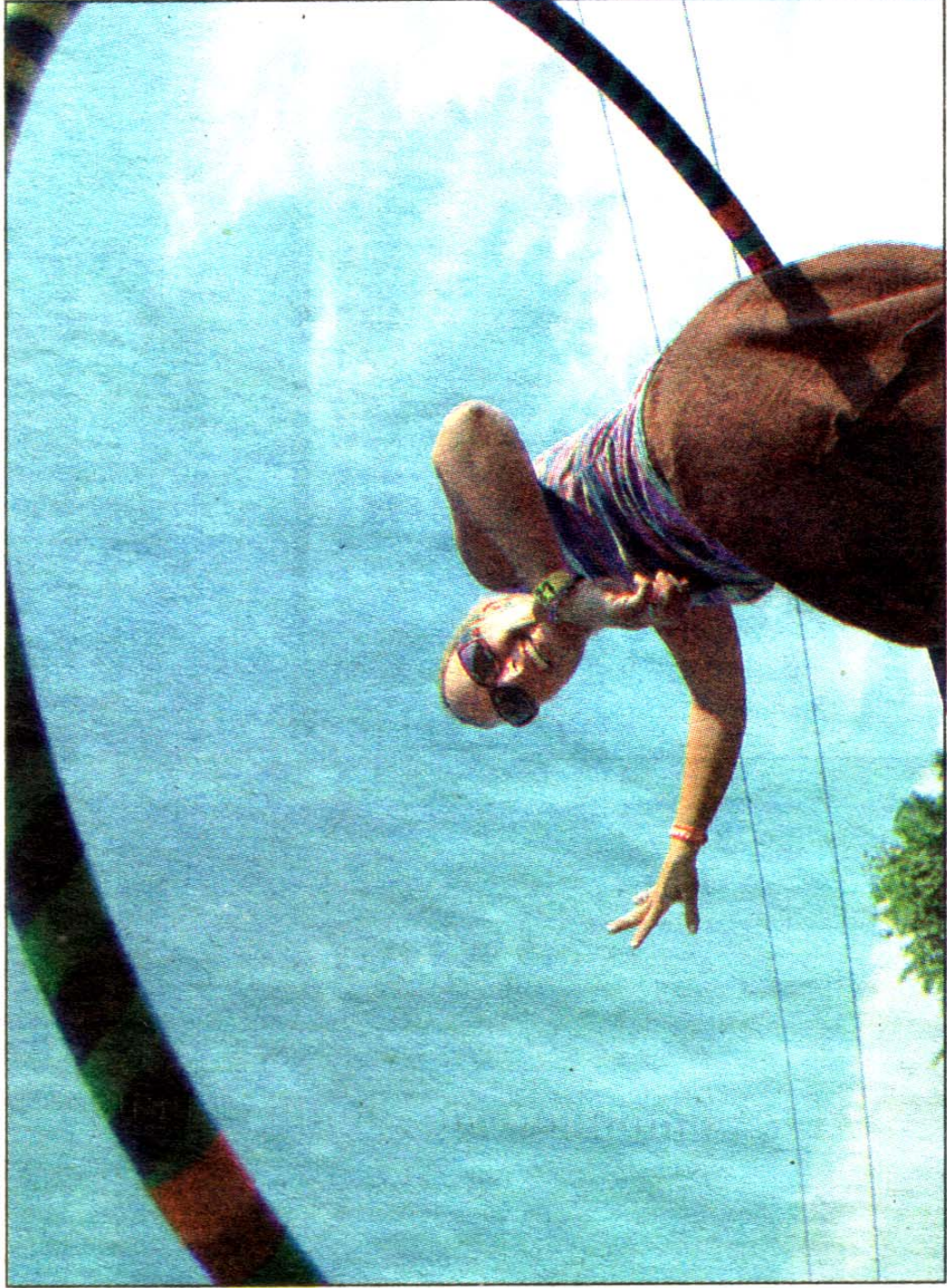
Go online for a video from opening day, photos and a schedule of events.

of Terrapin Productions and the founder of the Gathering of the Vibes, said that's just a matter of having a lot of cooperation from the city of Bridgeport and a solid work force in place.

► Please see **OPENING** on **A6**

Jess Braumann, of Coventry, R.I., plays with a Hula-Hoop as she listens to Phonograph play on the Solar Stage Thursday at Seaside Park during the first day of the Gathering of the Vibes in Bridgeport. The event continues today through Sunday.

**Autumn Pinette/
Staff photographer**



Opening sets stage for Vibes

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"Every year, we refine the process," Hays said. "With the help of the city, we work to make it better and better every year. Not bigger, just better. Quality is what we strive for.

"I have an amazing team around me. They take pride in what they're doing, whether they're volunteers or paid staff. We have 1,000 people working here from all over the country and they all add their piece to help create the fabric of the Vibes. It's a true team effort."

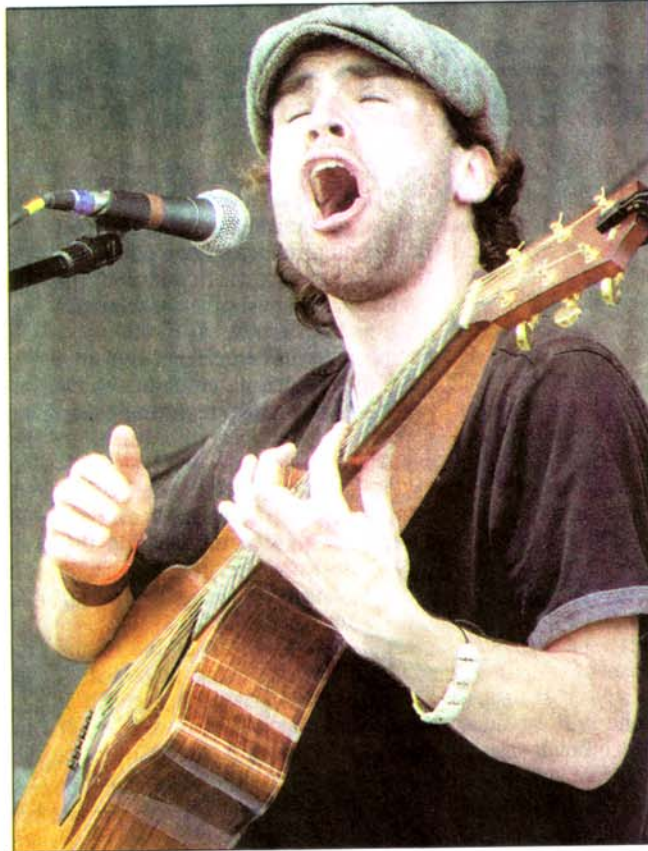
Though the campers avoided the exposed central staging area for the most part during the day, they did start pouring in late in the afternoon once the music started on the Main Stage, which is actually two huge stages side by side. That's when the festival finally started to feel like a real festival.

Actually, it started to feel like the Vibes as soon as master of ceremonies Wavy Gravy made his first appearance of the week to introduce Groovesect, a band from New Orleans. The '60s counter-culture icon, a West Hartford native, is a fixture at the Vibes.

There were only about 50 people watching Groovesect at first, but by the time the group's 90-minute set was finished, the numbers were in the hundreds. The crowd grew as the night went along with performances by Donna Jean and the Tricksters, a collaboration between former Grateful Dead singer Donna Jean Godchaux and The Zen Tricksters, and The Dark Star Orchestra, which recreates full Dead concerts.

The 13th annual Gathering of the Vibes opens for real today — Thursday was just for those camping out for all four days of the event — and the music starts at noon at the Main Stage with local rock band King for a Day kicking things off.

That seems fitting as KFAD



Ned Gerard/Staff photographer

Andrew Hoover, of Fairfield, performs on the Solar Stage Thursday afternoon during opening day of the Gathering of the Vibes at Bridgeport's Seaside Park.

singer-guitarist Danny Labich was a member of the first band, Stone Cold, to play at the initial Vibes in 1996 at Purchase, N.Y. Some of the other Main Stage headliners today include Zappa Plays Zappa, Dwezil Zappa's salute to his late father Frank's music; local funk band Deep Banana Blackout, a Vibes favorite; and The Black Crowes.

There also are plenty of local musicians on the schedule starting at noon on the Solar Stage, which is fully powered by renewable energy sources this year, sun and wind.

This is the second year back for the Vibes at Seaside Park after a six-year absence. The event was here in 1999 and 2000 before a refurbishing of the park forced the festival to move to sites in New York. The Vibes won't be moving again anytime soon, though, as Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch recently signed a five-year agreement with Terrapin Productions.

"It's grounding," Hays said of the pact. "This is home. I grew up in Fairfield County, in Greenwich, and Terrapin is

based in Bridgeport now, so this is home." Once again, WPKN-FM 89.5 will be broadcasting from the site all four days so you can hear what you're missing, but this year, for the first time, you can see it as well on the Web site www.gatheringofthevibes.com.

"If you can't be here to join us, you can still check out what's on stage," said Hays, who credited a "heroic effort" by Cablevision to give the site its ability to show the event. "My guess is there will be more than 100,000 people checking us out on the Web." With all of the planning over and the Vibes rolling, Hays was able to relax . . . a little.

"I feel good, to quote James Brown," said Hays, who was quick to point out that the late Godfather of Soul had played the Vibes in 2003. "I don't think I've ever felt this good on the first day of the festival — and this is the 13th one.

"It's unbelievable what the Parks Board and the city have done to revitalize this park. P.T. Barnum would be proud."