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Ned Gerard/Staff photographer
Singer Chris Robinson of the Black Crowes headlines the Gathering of the Vibes on the main "Moon Stage" in Bridgeport's Seaside Park Aug. 1.

Good Vibrations

From Local Musicians to Aging Hippies, Everyone had a Groovy Time at Music Fest

BY WENDY LOGAN

BRIDGEPORT — Giant, bright white, castle-like tents topped with multi-colored flags dot the periphery of the field. A man dressed in a purple suit crafted completely of Crown Royal bags is walking on stilts. Iridescent bubbles in all sizes float gently above the crowd. Women in beaded skirts and bikini tops twirl.

An old VW Van is parked in the middle of the swaying crowd. A sea of campers' tents stretches through the park, rimming the edge of the LI Sound. There are dreadlocks and hula hoops and tie dye. Karmas are getting washed. Bodies are getting painted. License plates hail from California, Nevada, Tennessee, Maine, Vermont, New York and Connecticut, to name a few. This is no 60s flashback. Or is it?

Welcome to Gathering of the Vibes, a modern-day hippie fest where thousands of music lovers from across the country and around the corner descended on our neighbors to the north, at Seaside Park in Bridgeport, from July 31 to Aug. 3. It was a weekend of dancing and revelry, of global awareness and friendship. There were crafts, clothing, art, photography and jewelry for sale. There was food and beer and

smoothies. There were hippies and business people, young and old, and in between.

Mostly, though, Gathering of the Vibes was all about the music: 46 bands on three stages, playing blues, rock, funk, soul, a little country, a little jazz, a little R&B, and a lot of Grateful Dead.

The festival's lineup included headliners Phil Lesh and Friends (Lesh is the former bass player from the Grateful Dead), The Black Crowes and The Neville Brothers. The featured acts were joined on the main stage by an impressive roster of musicians that included guitar icon Derek Trucks and his wife Susan Tedeschi in their band Soul Stew Revival, Dweezil Zappa and his band performing Zappa Plays Zappa, a shockingly brilliant tribute to rock legend Frank Zappa, Umphrey's McGee, Mike Gordon, Porter Batiste Stoltz, and beloved CT-grown funk band Deep Banana Blackout to name just a few. A short stroll toward the water found the Solar Stage area, with smaller, many locally-based bands, including The Grapes, The Durkins and Caravan of Thieves.

Woven into the music-centric event were subtle and more direct messages of eco-friendliness, social conscience and mutual respect. The Green Vibes environmental

initiative offered a host of information and education on how to affect positive change in world ecology. An entire section of the festival was devoted to Green Vibes as well as a diversity of other non-profit organization partnerships, including a food drive for the Family Center of the United Way, voter registration by HeadCount.org, Music for Democracy.org, the CT Clean Energy Fund, Clean Water Action and many more. The event's program as well as all the online materials provided by email to ticket holders reminded concert-goers to respect the grounds, the city and "your fellow VibeTribe." It called for people to help one another wherever possible. The overall theme for this Gathering of Vibes, much like that of the 60s, was of peace and it's hardly a stretch to suggest that the resurgence of this kind of thinking comes at a time when our country is engaged in a similarly questionable war with a similarly questionable political administration. So, with 20,000 fans on site each day, how did the VibeTribe do with the message?

According to Bridgeport Police Sergeant Kevin Gilleran who worked the festival, they practiced what they preached. "It's a very mellow crowd," he said. "Other than a few medical calls which are common at

any gathering of this size, we've really had no problems. Unlike a lot of other big festivals, these people aren't bothering anybody." A long-haired, tie-dyed shirted man approaches the officer to ask about the rules and times for departure from the park. After a brief exchange on the details, Gilleran tells him, "But hey, don't worry about that now, man. Enjoy the show."

Later, a woman pushing a stroller gets a wheel stuck in the curb, nearly toppling her child onto the ground. Within seconds, a disparate group of helpful Tribers comes to her aide.

Not all of the VibeTribe fall into the category of the aging hippie asking for Gilleran's wisdom on the rules or even younger hippie wannabees twirling in their tie dye to the Dark Star Orchestra; the Grateful Dead tribute band is as close as they'll ever come to the real thing (Jerry Garcia, the band's legendary front man, died in 1995).

Jimmy Christie, for example, a 49-year old financial broker who lives in Rowayton, said he is as big a fan as anyone. "I was a big Dead Head back in the day and probably saw them 60 or 70 times.

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Contributed photos/ Katie Stuart
King for a Day band members from left to right: Danny Labich, Randy Funke and Benj Lefevre.