

New Haven Register

Gathering For Music and More

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BRIDGEPORT — Call it what you want: one of the nation's leading "hippiefest" campouts or just a really large, loud, and oh-so-colorfully-attired tie-dyed family gathering. But one thing about Gathering of the Vibes is clear: This weekend, it owns Seaside Park — and a little bit of rain Friday morning and afternoon wasn't going to change that.

Gathering of the Vibes, at its core, an outgrowth of the music and culture of the Grateful Dead, now in its 12th year, is back in Bridgeport, where it took place in its early years, after several years at the Indian Lookout Country Club in Mariaville, N.Y., during which it grew in both size and stature. If you talk to some of the thousands of people who drove, flew or took trains and ferries in from points near and far, that's a pretty good thing.

Stacy Lawrence of Warwick, N.Y., one of about a dozen people displaying rather advanced Hula Hoop skills during a set by Railroad Earth, a popular New Jersey-based jam band, on one of the two main stages, was back at the Gathering for the first time since 1999 — when it also was at Seaside Park — and said the setting, right on Long Island Sound, is part of the draw.

For Lawrence, now 28, a lot has changed in eight years. She got out of college, got a job with IBM, got married last January on the "Moe Cruise" in the Caribbean, featuring Moe, a jam band, and bought her first home.

But "I get weekends off — and lots of flex time," she said, and she was pleased to again make the Gathering a part of her life.

"It's family-friendly and everybody is having a good time," Lawrence said, leaning on her hoop rather than undulating within it for a few moments. "It feels like family."

Another thing that's clear if you go to the Gathering is that if you think it's just a bunch 20-year-olds who missed the Grateful Dead-era and are now trying to live vicariously through the various offshoots and Dead-inspired progeny that remain, you'd be Dead wrong.

Corrie Carton of New Haven, no kid, met her daughter Katy Carton-Bacon of Burlington, Vt., also no kid, Friday afternoon at the Gathering, where both were working — in both cases so they could enjoy the music a little more economically. Katy's twin brother, Andrew, also was there.

For Katy Carton-Bacon, working for Terrapin Presents, which puts on the festival, doing concessions, it was her second visit. She went last year in upstate New York. For her mom, who was working in a clothing vendor's booth, it was the first time. Carton was looking forward to seeing George Clinton and Mickey Hart Friday and Chicago blues great Buddy Guy Sunday.

"This is a family gathering, dude," said Carton-Bacon. "It's all about family ... The family vibes thing, it sounds cheesy — but it's true!"

Kent and Lynn Kunst, who have been married 21 years, drove all the way from Owens Mills, Md., near Baltimore, through Wednesday night, to camp out near the shores of Long Island Sound — yes, in Bridgeport.



Playing music in the rain, rock & roll guitarist and Allman Brothers Band icon Dickey Betts, left, cranks out a classic Allman Brother Band guitar riff Friday in Bridgeport. (Peter Hvizdak/Register)

"We've never been here before — never been to Connecticut before," said Lynn Kunst, who said they camped out last year at Garcia's Birthday Bash, a festival in West Virginia.

But as one of her favorite artists, former Allman Brothers Band guitarist Dickey Betts & Great Southern, launched into "Statesboro Blues," they seemed pretty darned glad to be in Bridgeport.

Lynn Kunst, 52, works as an instructional assistant in a public school when she's not soaking up the vibes. Her husband, 51, is a machinist.

"I've seen a lot of concerts over the years," but Gathering of the Vibes offers "a similar feel to the old Dead concerts" before the scene grew too big, she said.

"I hope I never get too old to do this!" Kunst said.

Other national artists that played Thursday and Friday included the Dark Star Orchestra, Zero, Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart and his band, George Clinton and P-Funk and Deep Banana Blackout doing a tribute to James Brown.

Those still to come include Ryan Montbleau, Strangefolk, Donna Jean & the Tricksters featuring former Dead vocalist Donna Godcheaux and members of the Zen Tricksters, Assembly of Dust, Keller & the Keels, Les Claypool and Dead guitarist Bob Weir and Ratdog today and Kevin Hays & Friends, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Martin Sexton, The Wailers (of Bob Marley & the Wailers fame,) Buddy Guy and Los Lobos on Sunday.

The festival also includes a who's who of Connecticut jam-inspired and funk bands on one of its smaller stages, including bands such as Hubinger Street, Christopher Robin Band, FRO, the John Hickey Band, Cosmic Jibaros, Darian Cunning, the Bomb Squad, Hoe, Scarecrow Collection and The Breakfast. Day admission tickets are \$70 at the gate. The full schedule and ticket information are available at www.gatheringofthevibes.com.

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