

Plans Announced for Centennial Birthday Bash

The North Little Centennial Planning Committee announced plans today for a party on Main Street to observe the city's 100th birthday. Slated for Friday, April 30, and Saturday, May 1, **"CELEBRATE NORTH LITTLE ROCK: Party of the Century"** will be the major event in this year's centennial that marks North Little Rock's emergence as an independent city.

Mayor Patrick Henry Hays said that most of the festivities for the party will take place on Main Street, which will be blocked off from Broadway to Seventh Street. Having the flavor of a large reunion, opening ceremonies will begin about 6 p.m. Friday with a tribute to past and current civic and business leaders, followed by remarks from city and state officials. A jazz band and a string quartet will play. "We'd like to have a celebratory atmosphere," the mayor said. Prior to the opening ceremonies, a reception will be held for sponsors and special guests.

Argenta Public Arts will also host an Art Walk that Friday evening in conjunction with a centennial street party. Main Street businesses will display children's art in their windows so people can stroll up and down the street and go inside for closer inspection. At the same time, local bands will perform outside where visitors can kick back with refreshments and enjoy a centennial street party. Vince Insalaco, chairman of the Centennial Planning Committee, said that organizers wish "to get as many local bands involved as possible." However, he added, it may not be possible for the committee to contact everyone who might be interested in being part of the street party. "If we don't call you, call us," Insalaco requested.

Saturday will kick off with a prayer breakfast at 8 a.m. on the river between the Main Street Bridge and the Interstate 30 Bridge. Planned as a joint spiritual gathering that will feature both Christian and Native American traditions, the breakfast will be on a site along the Trail of Tears. North Little Rock, known only as "Opposite Little Rock" on maps at the time, was a major junction where several overland and water routes used in the Indian Removal of the 1830s and 1840s converged. The National Park Service is endeavoring to highlight the site as part of the National Trail of Tears.

There will be a nominal fee for breakfast, except for those who participate in the "Centennial Bicycle Ride" that will start about 9 a.m. at the site of the prayer breakfast. The first 250 people to show up for the bicycle ride will receive free centennial t-shirts. Alderman Charlie Hight, one of the organizers, said two bike rides are planned, a 15-mile jaunt along the river for casual riders out to Cook's Landing and back, and a 30-mile tour of North Little Rock and the river trail for more experienced riders. From the starting line, both groups will head up Main Street to Broadway, where the shorter route will go west and the longer route east. "We welcome bicycles of all types and cyclists at all levels, from beginners to biking veterans," Hight said. Assisting him are Judy McDowell, Rob Lambert and Don Gephardt.

The city's birthday party on Main Street will get into full swing about 10 a.m., offering a festival atmosphere with decorations, lighted trees, food and entertainment, arts and crafts, a hot-air balloon, games and amusements for children, carnival rides, a model railroad display, historical exhibits, period clothing and reenactments of some key events in the city's history. Booths lining the streets and two stages will help give the event the feel of a state fair midway. Partygoers will also have the public's first opportunity to look over the new trolley cars housed at Central Arkansas Transit Authority's maintenance barn near Seventh and Main. Next to the barn will be a "Children's Station" providing rides, games and a fire truck. But that will be only one of many stops along Main Street that will interest people of all ages. These stops will be called "stations" in recognition of North Little Rock's close historical ties to the railroad industry.

"Reunion Station" next to the Post Office at 420 Main Street will allow classmates, families, neighbors, retired and current railroad employees and active and retired military folks to get together and have their photographs made on the steps of the Post Office, which was built in 1931 on the site of the old city park that had been dedicated in 1905. Time will be reserved for school, family and military groups. Booths around the perimeter of Reunion Station also will be available to neighborhood organizations. In addition, a "Progressive History Tour" with guides will take visitors through the years, illustrated by exhibits and photographs, and a "Black Heritage Station" will focus on the African American experience in North Little Rock. The city's growing Latino community will be represented, as well, with interpreters manning two tables and extending greetings.

Union Pacific Railroad is planning a major exhibit that will touch on the past and the future. While the past is an obvious theme of the birthday party, the goals and dreams for what is to come are just as important in observing this 100-year milestone. Sponsored by the North Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, "Future Station" will showcase the many private and public development projects now in the works, including the city's plans for a maritime naval museum to harbor the World War II vintage "Razorback" submarine the city has acquired from Turkey. Terry Hartwick, who heads the Chamber, said the city will experience "one of the most exciting springs" with the arrival of the submarine and the opening of a new Chamber office at Main and Washington Avenue. "It's a good time for the future and a good time to enjoy the past," he said.

A major military tribute also is planned to honor military veterans and the men and women now on active duty. Beginning with construction of Fort Roots on Big Rock Mountain in 1896, North Little Rock has had a long association with the military. Camp Pike was built in 1917 as a major training center in World War I. Most of the military reservation was renamed as Camp Robinson a few years before the start of World War II and again became a principal training site.

Insalaco added that efforts are underway to secure major entertainment to headline the event. The evening will close with "Northern Lights" – a fireworks display tentatively planned for the Main Street viaduct. Other activities surrounding the celebration will include recommending construction of a permanent Centennial Garden near the railroad

overpass between Poplar Street and Alltel Arena. (The overpass will be removed). Plans are to plant a cypress “centennial tree” in the center of a 30-foot diameter brick planter. Annuals, holly, irises and azaleas also will be planted. The plan is to have volunteer groups maintain the garden. To help pay for the garden and its maintenance, as well as for the birthday party, the committee will sell bricks for \$50 each. Buyers will be able to have words or personal tributes inscribed on the bricks, which will be laid as walkways to the garden. Adjacent to the garden will be a centennial monument with the design to be determined by judges in a monument design contest. A plaque will mark the site and under it a time capsule will be buried – not to be reopened for 50 years. Contests to select original poems and art work about the city’s history also will draw participation from former and current residents.

Plans are moving ahead, too, for a professional art contest to select an original illustration to commemorate the city’s centennial through a First Day Cover limited edition collectible envelope, poster or postcard issued by the U.S. Postal Service. Main Street Argenta will team up with the Arkansas Arts Center to solicit and judge the entries, said Michael Drake, Main Street Argenta director. The artists, who must meet certain criteria and be either residents or former residents of North Little Rock, will compete for prize money, as well as the distinction of winning the competition, Drake said.

The Centennial Committee is encouraging local businesses to get involved by sponsoring special events, hosting meetings in North Little Rock and displaying the city’s Centennial logo on their windows and cars and using it in advertising and promotions. The committee is accepting applications for arts, crafts, commercial and food vendors for booth spaces of 10-feet by 20-feet on a first come basis. Vendor applicants should call Elizabeth Parten at 758-1424 or e-mail her at eparten@northlittlerock.org. The cost for a booth is \$150. Booths will be provided at no cost to neighborhood organizations. Vendors will be responsible for their own display equipment. Food vendors will need to provide their own vending trailer. All vendors will set up along Main Street, including the side streets of Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Street to Maple on the west and Poplar on the east.

Centennial Committee members are Insalaco, Sandra Taylor Smith, Herman Shirley, Joe Smith, City Clerk Dianne Whitbey, City Treasurer Mary Ruth Morgan, Michael Drake, Don Chambers, Debbie Strobel, Lt. Tom Latina of the Police Department, Ashley Davis, Terry Hartwick, Dan Scott, Elizabeth Parten, Ann-Marie LeBlanc, Margaret Powell, Andrew McCauley and Al McClandon.

A permanent Centennial Commission is being established. Commissioners who serve will take part in the year long activities as well as the birthday party. The Centennial Board of Commissioners will be announced soon. Information about the city’s centennial celebration is available on the web at www.northlittlerock.ar.gov. Click on “100-year celebration plans.”

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