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Princeton's Rum River Festival will return in 2020 as multi-day event

Tim Hennagir

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Little Miss Princeton and Princeton Ambassadors ride the city's float during the 2019 Rum River Festival Parade. Next year, the parade will move to Thursday night when the community celebration returns as a three-day event.

File Photo by Tim Hennagir

Princeton's Rum River Festival will return as a multi-day event featuring a Thursday night parade, Friday afternoon and early evening street fair, and a Saturday morning 5K Family Fun Walk/Run that will get a route change.

The 2020 celebration changes were confirmed recently by Kim Young, Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce executive director, after a large group of stakeholders convened for a Tuesday, Dec. 3 planning committee meeting.

“This is something new that I wanted to try this year,” Young said, referring to a large group working with sub-committees that will plan the festival’s key events.

The 2020 edition of the Rum River Festival will kick off Thursday, June 4, with a street fair starting at 4 p.m., Young said. The parade will follow at 6 p.m.

“I asked a long-serving committee member time why it was changed from a multi-day event to a single day years ago” Young said, referring to recent Rum River Festival celebrations being scheduled on a Saturday.

According to Young, the person she checked with said thousands of people would attend the parade when it was on a Thursday night, but no one would come back for the Saturday activities.

“We’ve scheduled a number of Friday afternoon and early evening events to keep people engaged,” she said. The events are scheduled for Riverside-Riebe Park.

For example, Young said the city of Princeton is working on a chalk art contest, inflatables, and a canoe run starting at 5:30 p.m. on Friday, June 5.

The Kinship Tug-O-War on the Rum will take place at 6 p.m. on Friday.

Organizers will drop the plastic paddlers at 7 p.m. for the Lucky Duck Race and Raffle, Young said, adding the Princeton Speedway will have races at 7 p.m.

“We are going to have to have a back-up plan for flooding in Riverside-Riebe Park,” Young said. “If it occurs, we would move everything up to the parking lot.”

The 5K Family Fun Walk/Run will wrap up a partial day schedule on Saturday, June 6.

“We are going to change the route this year,” she said. “Apparently, years ago, the run started near the top of Riverside Park or near the Princeton Public Library. This route is in a quiet area. The Farmers’ Market will be take place on Saturday.”

Young said she’s trying to learn more about having a third party organize a one-day softball tournament in Mark Park on the final day of the Rum River Festival.

“This used to be a huge event when I was a kid,” she said. “We’d like to get a one-day tournament on Saturday. That’s kind of in the works.”

According to Young, scheduling the Princeton Ambassadors Coronation is one item that’s still tentative at this point in the 2020 festival’s pre-planning.

There's talk of bringing the event back on a Wednesday night, Young said.

Princeton Police Chief Todd Frederick provided important input about the Rum River Festival's advance planning shortly after Young started as chamber executive director, she said, adding Frederick mentioned having the event on a single day places a strain on department personnel and resources.

Frederick attended the Dec. 3 planning meeting, He said he's been involved in planning or working approximately 20 Rum River Festivals in Princeton.

"We were having a little bit of difficulty managing a one-day event," Frederick explained. "It stretched us pretty thin. We are pretty busy on Friday nights with the races at Princeton Speedway, and everything else that's going on.

Frederick and the full complement of Princeton Police Department personnel work the day the Rum River Festival Parade is scheduled.

"I don't have a squad for every officer, so we have to get creative when it comes to all working at once," Frederick added. "We use our Bike Patrol officers, and we put multiple officers in cars. It's easier to manage events when they are spread out over a couple of days. I'm glad the Chamber invited us to the Dec 3 meeting."

Young said the next 2020 Rum River Festival planning meeting will occur Feb. 4.

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