

First Oktoberfest a Wedding Festival

By Rodney Wilson

The hoisting of steins, the forkfuls of sauerkraut, the oompah-pahs of passing tubas played by people in lederhosen: MainStrasse Village's annual Oktoberfest celebration is, without a doubt, a big party for Greater Cincinnati's German heritage. Yet, at the heart of the festival is a celebration of community that stretches back almost 200 years.

According to Oktoberfest.de, the official Munich Oktoberfest Web site, the festival originally began as a celebration for Bavarian crown prince Ludwig upon the event of his wedding to princess Therese from Saxony-Hildburghausen, on Oct. 12, 1810.

The townsfolk of Munich were invited to attend the festivities, which were held in the fields outside the city gates, an area that was immediately dubbed "Theresienwiese," or "Therese's green," in honor of the new princess.

Five days into the celebration, the National Guard decided that the event should be open to the whole of Bavaria, and organized a public horse race that attracted people from the entire countryside. The event was, we can be sure, a resounding success, as the country decided that the "Oktober-Festivals" should be celebrated the following year, as they have been every year since 1810.

Since the first Oktoberfest (or "Wiesn," short for Theresienwiese, to the residents of Munich), the celebration has grown from a small, pastoral festival with a carousel and a handful of beer stands into a giant, multi-national party for autumn, German cuisine and beer. Beer, in fact, became central to the event as, beginning in 1896, brewery-backed beer halls and beer tents were set up on Theresienwiese. In 1950, the sudsy beverage officially entered the annual festivities when Munich Mayor Thomas Wimmer tapped the first keg at exactly 12:00 noon and hollered out "O'zapft is'!" (meaning the first keg has been tapped), a ritual that has been practiced ever since.

At the root of all of the music and dancing, the eating and drinking and the general sense of fun, there is the famous wedding, and organizers of this year's MainStrasse Village Oktoberfest hope to remind people of those abiding nuptials with an event to mark the local festival's 25th anniversary.

"This is the 25th Oktoberfest and we're sort of tying our Oktoberfest with the reason why the original Oktoberfest got started," says Gary Disheimer, festival chairman for the MainStrasse Village Association, the organizers of Covington's Oktoberfest celebration. They're doing so by staging real-life weddings, performed by Covington Mayor Steve Hoffman, at locations in the four city blocks the festival spreads across. "We're going to be doing at least two in front of the Bell Tower, and two or three at the Goose Girl fountain, which is located at 6th and Main."

Disheimer says that five couples will exchange wedding vows as part of the three-day event. Four will pledge their love for the first time, while one couple will renew the vows they first spoke 10 years ago, at the Oktoberfest celebration. "We'll have one couple that got married 10 years ago, at Oktoberfest - they want to renew their vows down here."

So, when you head down to MainStrasse for Oktoberfest, be sure to tip a mug to Prince Ludwig and his lovely bride, Therese, and make your way over to the Bell Tower and the Goose Girl fountain to witness a tradition that started almost 200 years and 4,500 miles away in a place called Theresienwiese.



Sources

Oktoberfest.de,

<http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/fakten/geschichte.php>

Gary Disheimer, MainStrasse Village Association, www.M
859.491.0458

Want to get married at Oktoberfest?

There's still time to plan a German wedding with the traditional Volksmarch (people's marching band) playing polkas and more. Each bride must wear a traditional floral wreath. Both parties must be 21 years old and must have a Kentucky marriage license. Call the MainStrasse Village Association (859.491.0458) for more information. Wednesday, Sept. 3.

