

Community event to celebrate diversity

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ThisWeek Community News

Wednesday April 4, 2012 12:27 PM

Longtime Northland residents have had to deal, one way or another, with the area's growing diversity.

Now, Joyce Bourgault believes it's time to embrace it and celebrate it.

The Northland International Festival, which grew out of a continuing series of meetings Bourgault has convened of representatives from various nonprofit organizations, is scheduled to take place Aug. 25 and 26 at Northland Village Mall.

The free community event will feature food, music, dance and art. It is being sponsored by the Northland Performing Arts Center, Northland Alliance, Chase Bank, Northland Community Council and the North Side Health Advisory Committee.

Bourgault, founder of the Helping Hands Health and Wellness Center free clinic, is expecting the first Northland International Festival to be a major success that can be built upon in years to come.

"We're anticipating over 10,000 people, easy," she said last week. "Especially with something new, people are curious; they want to know what it's all about.

"The opening ceremony will have just about every politician you can think of connected with the Northland area. You name it, they'll all be there."

The free gathering will start with a parade off Morse Road, past the Ohio Department of Taxation and ending at the headquarters of Franklin County Job and Family Services. People marching in the parade will be carrying flags from the various nations represented by residents who have come to the United States and settled on Northland as their home.

Bourgault anticipates 60 to 70 countries will have their flags hoisted for permanent display on light posts outside the county office facility.

"It will be kind of like the United Nations of Northland," she said. "That's just a rough estimate. How many we'll really get, who knows?"

Groups are being asked to step forward to serve as sponsors for the flags, at \$125 each.

Food vendors are being lined up and there will be crafts sales those days.

In addition, the festival will celebrate art, with works being hung inside the Northland Performing Arts Center, a section of the old Northland Mall's J.C. Penney store. A special room will be set aside in the headquarters of Vaud-Villities Productions Inc. featuring displays from Northland's past.

"Northland's got a rich history to it," Bourgault said.

The display will also include information about what the future may hold for the community.

"One of the high points of the whole event is it will continue," Bourgault said. "We're going to be bringing in a lot of art and entertainment and people who are providing different foods. What we hope is, we're going to have art that we can continue to celebrate by sending it around the community to different places for people to enjoy.

"We're really excited," she added. "We've got a really great steering committee. We've got just about every organization out of the nonprofits and they're going to be taking

responsibilities for different areas.”

A grant from the Chase 200Columbus Neighborhood Grant Program, received through the Greater Columbus Arts Council, is providing the seed money for the Aug. 25-26 gathering.

“It actually came out of the nonprofit summits,” Bourgault said of the idea for the festival. “We’re trying to find things within the community that are needs of the community, and one of the things was to celebrate diversity. We are a very diverse community and it’s something we want to celebrate, rather than it be viewed as a problem.

“No one person said, ‘Oh, let’s have a festival.’”

Although Bourgault is hoping the Northland International Festival becomes as popular as Comfest in Goodale Park, there will be one key difference:

“There won’t be any alcohol; that always seems to create problems,” she said. “But there will be a lot of food and a lot of fun.

“I think it will be really, really a cool thing.”