

Downtown rocks with street dance

By Shaun Zinck szinck@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Saturday, August 3, 2013 10:00 am

Hundreds partied in the State Street block between Broad Street and Grand Avenue Friday night, living it up at the 20th annual Celebrate Downtown street dance.

The crowd started to gather around 5:30 p.m., but by 7:30 p.m. it was standing room only.

The two-day event serves as the largest fundraiser of the year for the Downtown Beloit Association. Food vendors lined the streets selling full racks of ribs, brats, hotdogs and tacos.

Executive Director Shauna El-Amin said last year the event raised about \$30,000. El-Amin was selling tickets at a booth along State Street. Organizers were wearing gray shirts that read "Downtown Beloit Exit 185" on the front.

"It's always a great community hang out," El-Amin said. "There's live music, family and always great food."

This being the twentieth year, El-Amin said she hopes it's bigger than all of the previous years.

Reverend Raven and the Chain Smokin' Altar Boys kicked off the music around 5:30 p.m. Many came from both Illinois and Wisconsin to come hear the blues band play for the second year running.

Bob and Vickie Corwin, who live in Durand, Ill., came last year because of Reverend Raven. Durand is about 20 miles southwest of Beloit.

"I had no idea what kind of music he played, but we thought the name was interesting," Bob said. "I love blues music. These guys are great."

Bob said he took the day off and came up to the event at noon with his daughter who works in Loves Park to have lunch.

"Last year was really hot, but this weather is great," he said.

The night also helped gather old friends as members of the Beloit Memorial High School Class of 1973 were having their 40-year reunion.

Sue Carpenter, who helped organize the reunion, said about 100 people including spouses were planning on showing up either on Friday or today.

Graduate Jolynn Garetson, along with her husband Dave, said they planned the reunion around Celebrate Downtown. She added she and her husband have been to the event all 20 years.

"We've never missed a show," she said. "We love seeing all our old friends every year."

The night's headliner was The Eddie Butts Band, funk and R&B.

Carol Smout and Tom Miller came from Boynton Beach, Fla., but are originally from Janesville. Miller said they retired down to Florida about three years ago, but he knows Danny Moore, the piano player from Reverend Raven.

"It was perfect timing," he said. "This is great music and the weather is beautiful this year."

Despite being around for two decades there are always newcomers to the event. Janesville resident Joe LeBeau came with his wife Kathy Snyder and a couple friends for the first time this year.

"Beloit is such a welcoming community," he said. "This is amazing."

LeBeau said he grew up in Southern California and has always loved blues music.

"We started going to the music at the park this year, and what Beloit has done to the riverfront is wonderful," he said.

Beloit native Anne Sholes brought her mother, Sharon Denu, and her daughters Grace and Hadley for the first time this year.

"I heard about it from people I knew and they said it was always a lot of fun," she said adding she thought the atmosphere of the event was the best part.

Jessica Fox-Wilson, husband Aaron Wilson and daughter Nora moved to Beloit about a year ago.

"It sounded like something fun to do and it was cheap," Jessica said.

The fun continues today with the Farmer's Market and Street Sale from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.