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Greene Co.

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WAYNESBURG – Tuesday, on what turned out to be a brisk Rain Day morning, special events commission volunteers; Melody Longstreth, Michelle King and Athena Bowman were busy going over last minute details. Only one thing was completely out of their control. After the months of planning for this 2014 Rain Day celebration, would it rain?

And then, at 10:57 a.m. in the middle of Longstreth’s legal pad of notes came a splat. It was official; rain had fallen for the 117th time in the last 141 years.

“We all looked at each other,” Longstreth said, making note that she was holding onto the water-marked paper as evidence.

One of the amazing things about Rain Day is how this one-day-per-year street fair resonates far and wide. In South Carolina, the headline Tuesday afternoon read, “Only a sprinkle, but enough for Pa. town Rain Day.” In Florida, the *Miami Herald* proclaimed, “Pennsylvania town gets wet yet again on Rain Day.” WHAM Channel 13 in Rochester, N.Y., reported “Pennsylvania town rain tradition continues.” And, in Minneapolis, Minn., the *Star Tribune* told its readers, “It was only a sprinkle, but it counts: Southwestern Pennsylvania town gets wet on Rain Day.”

Those gathered in the borough too exemplified the reach of the phenomenon that is Rain Day.

There was the North Carolina visitor who just had to purchase seven Rain Day T-shirts to take back home with him for family. He told borough manager Mike Simms he makes the trip every year.

Annie Kalp of Mt. Pleasant was just a little girl when her grandmother, the late Shirley Ringer of East Finley, brought her the first time. They came every year after. Kalp carried on the tradition with her own daughter, Georgia Jordan, 8.

Taking part in the Rain Day umbrella contest were sisters Caroline and Ellie Sesin, 6 and 3 years old, of Virginia, in town to visit their aunt, Franci King of Waynesburg.

And then, there was Drew Gregory Ashley, 6, of Louisville, Ky. In 2008, then-mayor Blair Zimmerman (now a Greene County commissioner) phoned a Kentucky hospital to wish a happy birthday to Drew, born on, you guessed it, July 29.

“This is the first Rain Day we’ve got to come and celebrate,” said his mother, Alyssa. “We’ve been joking all day that the town threw Drew a party.”

Although it was his first time at Rain Day, Drew knows all about the festival that shares his birthday. The family’s tie to Waynesburg began when Drew’s dad, Chris, was at the University of Kentucky with the late Greg Shipe of Waynesburg.

Proud of his hometown, Shipe used to tell stories about the Rain Day celebration there, and Chris never forgot the date. When he learned Drew’s due date was July 29, Chris made sure that was locked in.

Although doctors offered to take the baby two weeks sooner, by cesarean section, Drew was destined to be a Rain Day baby, Alyssa said. So, Tuesday, the family came to the celebration with Dr. Bruce Shipe, Greg's father, to see Rain Day firsthand.

After rattling off games, face painting and food, Drew said the best part of Rain Day for him was "visiting Uncle Bruce."

Crowned the 2014 Miss Rain Day Sunday afternoon, Morgan Voithofer of Carmichaels began her official duties at the festival as she spent much of the day posing with young girls who hope to one day be in her shoes. One of the goals she set for her reign is to encourage girls, such as these, to pursue the dream of becoming Miss Rain Day.

"I burst into tears as soon as I heard my name," Voithofer said of winning the title. She said she was "confident and proud of myself when I won. I know it sounds cheesy but believe in yourself."

And what Rain Day would be complete without the bragging rights of the current mayor of Waynesburg Borough kept intact to not only proclaim, "It has rained," but to make that all important phone call to collect on the Rain Day hat bet.

Mayor Duncan Berryman will be receiving a hat from Emmy Award-winning actress Patricia Heaton. Berryman's bet with Heaton was facilitated through Heaton's longtime friend and fellow actress, Sarah Rush. Rush is a Greene County native, featured in "The Bituminous Coal Queens of Pennsylvania," which was filmed in Greene County and produced by Heaton. Rush was named Coal Queen in 1972.

"It is nice to have been able to make the bet with a celebrity that is still active in their career," Berryman said. "You can still see her work on television in her current show."

Heaton plays the lead role of Frankie Heck in the ABC hit sitcom, "The Middle." She is also known for her work as Debra Barone in "Everybody Loves Raymond."

Berryman said it was nice to not have to think about whether it would rain all day or not.

"I'm happy. It has been a good festival, a lot of fun. Everybody wants it to rain. It's nice to see it rain early instead of worrying about it all day," Berryman said. "They said there is a better chance for it to rain in the

afternoon than there was this morning. I'd like to see a few more drops, but we'll take it."

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