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Rain reigns again in Waynesburg

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Larry Roberts/Post-Gazette

Marcia Webber of Waynesburg Tuesday carries an umbrella through the Rain Day festival area. According to the mayor, it rained at 10:57 am.

By Albert Anderson / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Rain Day, the annual celebration of one man's meteorological profiteering, brought the citizens of Waynesburg out in full force Tuesday, each with one eye on the live music, food and merchant stalls and the other on the sky. And yes, it did rain.

The tradition started in the late 1800s when a Waynesburg farmer remarked to Byron Daly that it would surely rain on July 29 because it was his birthday and he had always noted rain. Not one to let opportunity pass, Mr. Daly began betting on the phenomenon with visiting salesmen to his drugstore. The wager was typically a hat, and soon Mr. Daly had an impressive collection.

Over a century later, the tradition has evolved into one of the largest annual events in Waynesburg, although these days the special events commission handles the hat wager. In past years, figures such as Bing Crosby, Muhammad Ali and Donald Trump have tried their luck. This year's hat will come courtesy of Patricia Heaton of "Everybody Loves Raymond" fame.

Mayor Duncan Berryman made the official announcement, deeming that the skies above Waynesburg had given way to sprinkles at 10:57 a.m., the 114th time rain has fallen during the day in the 141-year history of the tradition.

"This is the event that put Waynesburg on the map," said Mr. Berryman, who can boast a perfect precipitation record in his two years as mayor. "We get calls from overseas, from the West Coast, wanting to know if it rained. It provides a lot of good memories for a lot of people."

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One of those people is surely Morgan Voithofer, 15, who won the title of this year's Ms. Rain Day after an ironic performance of "Don't Rain on My Parade." Despite her choice of song, she said she was excited that it had rained. "It really brings the town together, and it's a lot of fun."

Rain Day is a unique event because, as Athena Bowman put it, "it draws a crowd, and people don't run when it rains, they stay!" Mrs. Bowman has been on the special events commission that organizes the event since 2004, and said the planning begins in February. When it all comes together, "everyone is having a good time, everyone is happy."

But what happens if the rain never arrives? "It really puts a damper on things," Mr. Berryman said.

Luckily that was not the case this year, pushing the accuracy of that old farmer's prediction to just over 80 percent. Perhaps the rest of Western Pennsylvania should learn to embrace rain like those in Waynesburg.

Albert Anderson: 412-263-1454 or aanderson@post-gazette.com.

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