Minneapolis Urban League hosts 23rd Annual Family Day at Plymouth and Penn Ave.

Waves and cheers; drummers and dancers; floats and fancy cars were just some of the sights from the Minneapolis Urban League Family Day Parade held on Saturday, August 25, to kick off the 23rd Annual Family Day event. Thousands of twin cities residents turned out for the fun, fellowship, community resources, and stellar entertainment. Even the rain could not dampen the spirits of the people who came out to celebrate.

Again this year, Family Day was 'back on the block,' with activities filling the entire area between Logan and Penn Avenues. Lining both sides of the street were numerous information booths and tables full of useful resources for families. Nutrition counselors, childcare providers, family care and wellness support experts, mortgage and homeownership representatives, and education and college enrollment specialists were some of the experts available on site to speak with attendees. This was truly a day for residents to not only have fun, but to be enriched by their exposure to the community resources available to them.

Food was plentiful; nine vendors filled the food court. From pulled-pork sandwiches, spicy barbecued ribs and turkey legs, warm kettlecorn, to freshly buttered sweet corn on the cob, all palates were satisfied. The MUL's new social enterprise, Taste of Plymouth Catering, who was among those vendors, provided free food vouchers to give folks a taste of what they can anticipate from this venture. Also free were beverages donated by Coca Cola

Bottling and hotdogs provided by NorthPoint Health & Wellness, and served by the MUL's volunteer auxiliaries, the Young Professionals and Guild.

The first big highlight of the day came when the drill teams competed in front of the main stage. Five groups vied for the chance to be voted the 'best' and to earn a trophy and a $2,000 cash prize. In the end, it was Love Works Academy who took the top prize. The competition also featured a special reunion performance by the Leo Johnson drill team who many of the crowd remembered from 'back in the day' when 'The Way' used to hold an annual parade and street festival on Plymouth Avenue. They thrilled the crowd with a routine that honored the memory of Leo Johnson and showed that even though they may be beyond their teen years, they could have easily competed alongside their younger counterparts.

From that point on, local talent from throughout the Twin Cities performed nonstop on the main stage. Performances included Praise dancers, gospel performers, solo singers, spoken word artists, musicians , line dancers, Zumba instructors and even a ventriloquist. At around 5:00 p.m., the Northside Pride concert got underway, headlined by Ray Covington and the Maxx Band, Power, Tyka Nelson, Isis, and Andre Cymone. The Sounds of Blackness capped off the evening with a stirring performance of their hit, "Hold On."

Laughter could be heard all around by the hundreds of children who bounced in the colorful play domes, rode the live ponies, or had their faces painted. There were also youth who competed in 3 on 3 basketball tournament and other shooting skills. Every age group found a fun activity to keep them busy.

Inside the Glover Sudduth Center building, Al McFarlane, Editor-in-Chief of Insight News, hosted a fitness exhibition and forum. McFarlane himself has been on a personal journey he calls "Getting Fit After 60" that he says has motivated him to change his eating and fitness habits. Some 20 people were lead by fitness trainers from Chizel Inc. and Real Athletics in a series of exercise routines using a variety of apparatus, including hand weights, resistance bands, and fitness balls. Participants learned how good eating habits combined with a consistent exercise routine could improve health and prolong life.

This year's theme was "Live, Learn, Breathe," reflecting a pact among the Minneapolis Urban League and our corridor partners Estes Funeral Home, NorthPoint Health and Wellness, and University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach Center, to promote health and wellness. The three components of this pact are defined as follows: Live – We pledge to promote healthy and violence free lives. We will support one another's efforts to end the senseless violence that plagues our neighborhoods and mars the true spirit of unity that exists in our community. Learn – We pledge to educate the community about the hazards of second-hand smoke; particularly its impact on children. We will equip youth, adults and families with knowledge about preventative strategies for addressing these hazards. Breathe – We pledge to establish our facilities as smoke and tobacco free campuses by the end of this year.

"There was truly something special about this year's Family Day. I am extremely thankful for the dedicated and hard work provided by the MUL staff, the commitment from our partners and sponsors, and the tremendous resources that were offered by all of the vendors and exhibitors," said Scott Gray, President and CEO of the Minneapolis Urban League. " We look forward to continuing to offer this opportunity for our community to come together to fellowship, recharge, have fun and get connected."

A perfect day ended with the announcements of the winners of two raffles: one for a pair of tickets to any Southwest Airlines destination, and the other was for a Toro lawnmower.

The Minneapolis Urban League initiated Family Day during the summer of 1989 to promote positive family interaction and long-held tradition of gathering together as a community. Family day offers inner city residents an alternative to expensive parades and festivals.

We want to thank the following sponsors for making this year's event possible: American Petroleum Institute (API), Southwest Airlines, Coca Cola Bottling, Comcast, UCare MN, Community Action of Minneapolis, Mortenson Construction, CenturyLink, Associated Bank, Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), Xcel Energy, and Building Blocks. Special thanks to media partners Insight News and KMOJ, and major sponsor NPG Records.