

THE NORTHSIDE ROCK AND ROLL CARNIVAL



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COMMUNITY FUND



IT'S A COUPLE DAYS BEFORE THE 4TH OF JULY...

Where in Cincinnati can you go to enjoy live music in the company of thousands of neighbors, throw back craft beers, and partake of great food under the summer sun? This funky good time can only be had at Northside's Rock and Roll Carnival. The carnival wrangles the best of offbeat local and national acts to help the neighborhood prepare for its legendary 4th of July Parade.



A LONGSTANDING HISTORY

Since the 1970s, following Northside's 4th of July Parade, the [Northside Business Association](#) has

CHRIS SCHADLER



hosted a family-friendly festival for the community. Within the past decade, however, this event has metamorphosed into an edgier version of itself: the Rock and Roll Carnival. This new incarnation of the festival is the brainchild of Chris Schadler, an experienced Cincinnati-area music promoter and entrepreneur.



CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE

Drawn to the beat of its vibrant underground music scene, Schadler moved to Northside in 2000. In 2005, Schadler and a makeshift band of friends started playing obnoxiously loud music during the 4th of July Parade as a practical joke to drown out the noise from political talking heads. Much to his surprise, the Northside Business Association reacted with enthusiasm instead of annoyance, enlisting Schadler to schedule bands for entertainment in nearby [Jacob Hoffner Park](#) after the parade had ended.

This embryonic Rock and Roll Carnival, although promising, left much to be desired. Music lovers who might otherwise have attended the event found themselves sweltering and fatigued from the July heat after viewing the parade and sought the refreshing libations of shaded patios like the one at local hangout [Northside Tavern](#) or retreated indoors.

NORTHSIDE TAVERN



It was at this very bar that Schadler and his friends, recognizing the issues with the event, conceived the changes that would make the festival into today's Rock and Roll Carnival. To mimic the shaded beer garden vibe of Northside Tavern, they planned to reschedule the musical performances to the night before the parade and offer more beverages, creating a more adult-oriented atmosphere.

With the blessing of the Northside Business Association, Schadler teamed up with Leslie Scott, a Northside entrepreneur, to bring this new vision to life in 2006. Drawing on their respective strengths, Schadler booked local bands and entertainment offerings while Leslie handled the logistics of the event, such as securing the necessary licenses and permits and mobilizing an army of volunteers. In the spirit of Northside's radical inclusivity, the duo pledged to establish the Rock and Roll Carnival as completely free



for the community to attend.



In these early years, the Rock and Roll Carnival was underwritten by the Northside Business Association and three founding sponsors: [Northside Tavern](#), [Shake It Records](#), and [The Comet](#). Of course, the festival's early existence was also indebted to the thousands of hours logged by eager volunteers. The event's tight budget barely sufficed to pay the bands and carnival acts, let alone a corps of event staff. Unexpected costs and slumps in beer sales due to rain could be big problems: Bruce Demske, vice president of the Northside Business Association and leader of web development company [Ella.net](#), told us that Schadler and Scott deferred their compensation one particularly lean year to ensure that the bands could be paid.

The extremely hard work of these founders, impassioned volunteer engagement, and overwhelmingly positive community response has established the Rock and Roll Carnival as an integral part of life in Northside. Schadler, although now letting others organize the event, predicts that only a “monumental force” could discontinue the carnival.

PUTTING ON A SHOW

The Rock and Roll Carnival tries to recreate the diversity of Northside itself in the way its bands are booked. And just like maintaining the community, creating the perfect schedule of acts is hard work.

Peyton Copes, the man currently behind the music, explained his job on a Friday afternoon at [Tacocracy](#), an eclectically adorned taco joint along Hamilton Avenue. As bluesy rock blared over the smells of cooks slinging mouthwatering Mexican from behind the counter, Copes discussed the many challenges and opportunities that come with the role.

A HOME FOR TACOS



PEYTON COPES

As a relatively small event, the Rock and Roll Carnival doesn't have the resources to directly compete with the larger music festivals in the area. Copes acknowledged that his budget "puts us in a different realm from the Bunburys and the Midpoints" of Cincinnati, but emphasized that this limitation gives the event a unique focus. Instead of trying to woo big-name headliners, he aims to attract local or regional acts that are "on the verge" of breaking onto a larger stage. "Get 'em while they're still cheap and around!" he added with a grin.

PROTOMARTYR



TWIN PEAKS



THE SIDEKICKS



(CLICK THE BAND NAMES TO SEE THEM IN ACTION!)

The lineup Copes booked for the 2014 carnival certainly speaks to his success in finding musicians just before they are propelled to new popularity. [Protomartyr](#), the Detroit-based post-punk band who headlined Saturday of that year's event, made the venerable music magazine NME's "Best Albums of the Year" list for 2014 and will play the tastemaking Pitchfork Music Festival in July. Chicago garage rockers [Twin Peaks](#), who headlined Friday of 2014, recently concluded a hugely successful tour of Europe and have been [favorably reviewed](#) by the music blog Stereogum. Among Ohio bands, Columbus's [The Sidekicks](#) got signed to the punk label Epitaph and have been touring across the US.

TWEENS THE RECORD



TWEENS THE BAND



Copes's own group, the self-described "trash pop" [Tweens](#), could be counted among the acts from last year's lineup who have reached new heights. After a [positive review](#) in Pitchfork for their self-titled album, the band has attracted national attention and toured extensively. But despite their success beyond Northside, Copes recounted Tween's Rock and Roll Carnival show "as one of the coolest shows of the year last year because it was sort of a homecoming, and it was the end of an event that I had put together." To him and other local musicians, nothing beats the feeling of playing for old friends on one of Northside's "high holy days," when the whole neighborhood can come together to celebrate music.

Another fixture of the Cincinnati music scene was happy to weigh in about what makes the Rock and Roll Carnival special for the bands that play it. Daisy Caplan, the extravagantly hirsute bassist for [Foxy Shazam](#), opened by flat-out stating, “I don’t like music festivals. I think they’re terrible.” He quickly clarified that claim, explaining that many festivals seem to be



more about selling expensive tickets and pushing merchandise instead of experiencing the music or building a sense of community. The carnival is a rare free event that avoids many of these problems while still managing to book a solid lineup from the local scene and regional favorites.

Daisy added that the openness of the carnival encourages listeners to explore acts that they otherwise would have never encountered. In his words, the event makes it “inexpensive to take a chance” on an unknown local group. And because the carnival doesn’t focus on well-known headliners, more of these obscure bands can get booked. The goal instead becomes to create an atmosphere of “neighborhood people sharing art.” People get the chance to showcase their different roles in the Northside community: “at one moment, they’re the lead singer of a band; at another moment, they’re selling you coffee.” What results is a singular blend of creativity, collaboration, and camaraderie.

**“I DON’T LIKE MUSIC FESTIVALS.
I THINK THEY’RE TERRIBLE.”**

(CLICK THE NAMES FOR VIDEO!)

Many Cincinnati acts will get the chance to experience that feeling themselves at the 2015 carnival. Copes said that he's aiming for a roughly 50/50 mix of local and out-of-town bands, with a focus on the Midwest in general. While the event is named after rock and roll, all genres are welcome to round out the carnival's sound. "This year there'll be some bluegrass, and maybe a little country-ish stuff. In the full mix, it's a diverse pot," Copes explained.

Although a few headliners still needed to fall into place at the time of Copes's interview, he was able to reveal several of the roughly 20 acts that will play over the weekend of the 4th. Local rockers [Ohio Knife](#), who recently partnered with Christian Moerlein Brewing Co. to release [their own brand of amber ale](#), are set to take the stage with their thumping, fuzzed-out tunes. Kids from the [Mason School of Rock](#) promise to bring youthful energy with their covers of classic bands like Led Zeppelin and AC/DC. From slightly farther afield, the Bloomington, Indiana-based [Thee Tsunamis](#) offer a groovy blend of '60's surf, girl-group bubblegum, and modern punk attitude.

OHIO KNIFE



THEE TSUNAMIS



TWEENS AT THE 2013 CARNIVAL



**“ONE OF THE COOLEST SHOWS OF THE YEAR LAST YEAR
BECAUSE IT WAS SORT OF A HOMECOMING, AND IT WAS
THE END OF AN EVENT THAT I HAD PUT TOGETHER.”**

For fun, Copes considered what three acts he would book for the Rock and Roll Carnival if money weren't an issue, and his responses only reinforced the thoughts behind his current local approach to scheduling. First on his mind were [The Afghan Whigs](#), Cincinnati “hometown heroes” who'd made it big before taking a decade-long hiatus. The band is now playing shows again, including [a recent performance](#) on “Jimmy Kimmel Live!”, and are long overdue for a proper homecoming. “I feel like everyone in the neighborhood would lose their minds if they played,” said Copes. He finished his trio with [Guided by Voices](#) and [The Breeders](#), two long-running and legendary acts from Dayton, Ohio. The independent spirit of these groups, combined with their appeal to both older fans and the new generation of rockers, would mesh perfectly with the overall vibe of the carnival.

THE BEST OF BEVERAGES

With their own personal beer, the band Ohio Knife has successfully [combined brewing with music](#), but they're far from the only ones at the festival to do so: beer, particularly local craft beer, has been integral to the Rock and Roll Carnival since its inception. The event aims to match the variety of bands with its beverage selection, and thanks to Cincinnati's [rich brewing history](#), there are always plenty of choices to sample on 4th of July weekend.

Northside has long been involved with exposing drinkers to a better class of brew. According to Chris Nascimento, partner at [Brew Monkeys](#) and a member of the board for [Cincinnati Beer Week](#), local watering hole [The Comet](#) was one of the few places in Cincinnati that offered a wide variety of beers before the [recent explosion of microbrewing](#) in the area. That exposure to diversity spurred the successful growth of bars such as [Northside Tavern](#) and [Mayday](#), even as similar drinkeries floundered elsewhere in the region. Nascimento explained that in other places, patrons “wouldn't touch the beer, and it'd sit there and go bad. Here in Northside,

that doesn't happen.” Now, Northside is even set to open its own microbrewery, [Urban Artifact](#); appropriately enough, the owners plan to pair their suds with a music venue and live theater space under the same roof.



When it comes to the carnival, beer fulfills both business and pleasure. Because all of the weekend's entertainment is free to watch, the organizers rely on beer sales and beer-related sponsorships to keep the party going. Half-jokingly, Chris commented that “the carnival survives based on how thirsty people are that weekend.” Among the largest sponsors of the event is [Cavalier Distributing](#), which makes the beers from Cincinnati's popular [MadTree Brewing Company](#) available to bars and restaurants across the region.

IN OTHER PLACES, PATRONS “WOULDN’T TOUCH THE BEER, AND IT’D SIT THERE AND GO BAD. HERE IN NORTHSIDE, THAT DOESN’T HAPPEN.”

But Cavalier and MadTree offer more than just financial backing to the Rock and Roll Carnival. The event offers them a unique chance to give back to the community and recognize the support local drinkers have provided; Nascimento recounted an episode from MadTree’s early days when he helped the then-homebrewers hand out koozies at a beer festival. Cavalier has worked to promote offerings from local brands outside of their distribution portfolio at the carnival as well, such as [Mt. Carmel](#) and [Blank Slate](#). Last year, the company ran a “Meet the Brewer” booth where enthusiasts could ask questions of the men and women behind their favorite potables, and it has provided extensive technical support to keep refrigerated kegs and taps running smoothly throughout the challenges of the July heat.

BEERS AND BANDS MAKE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC



GALAXY HIGH



THIRD SHIFT



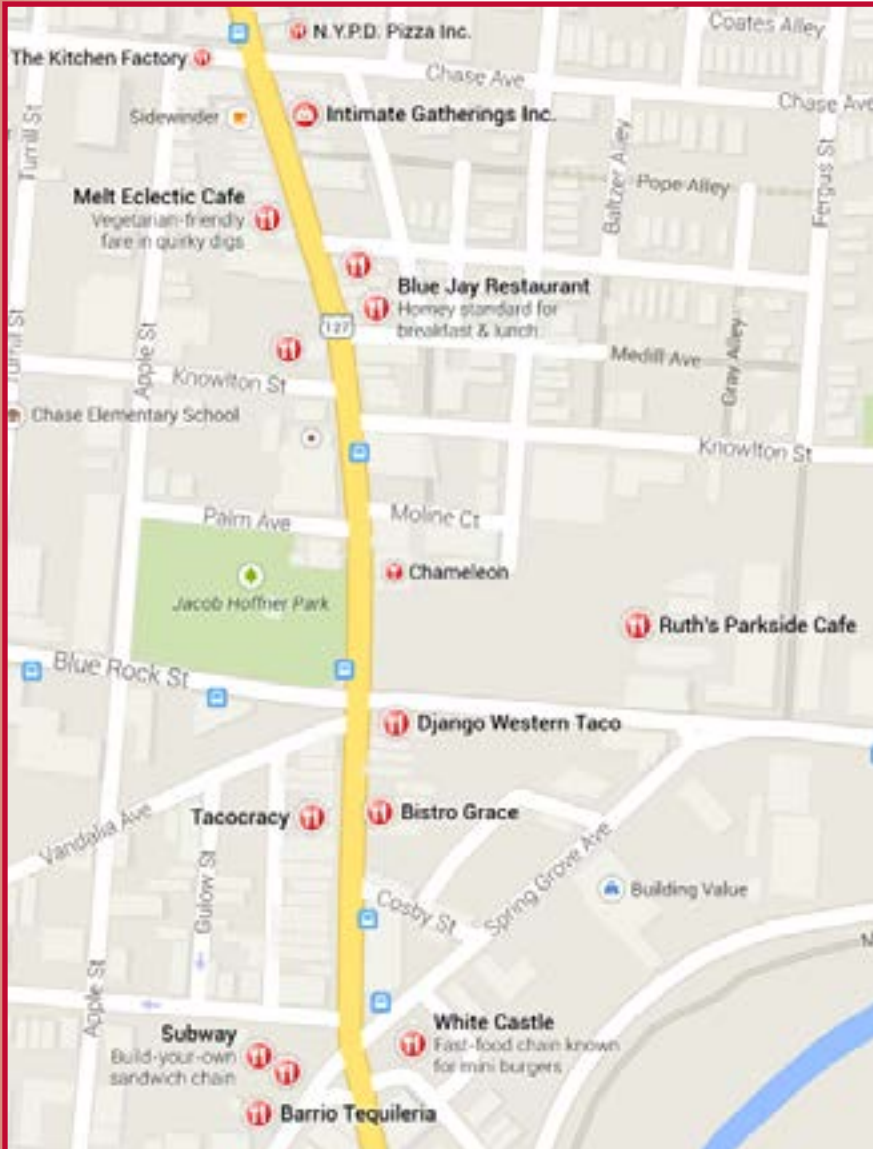
UNCLE



Nascimento also recommended several beer options for curious drinkers at the Rock and Roll Carnival. Although he seemed visibly pained by having to choose only a handful of brews, he was eventually able to offer three strong favorites. MadTree's [Galaxy High](#) is an intensely flavorful Imperial India Pale Ale brewed with eponymous Galaxy hops. Mt. Carmel's [Third Shift](#) Imperial Coffee Stout employs locally roasted beans (from Cincinnati's [La Terza Roasterie](#)) to create rich hints of dark fruit and chocolate. Finally, [Rhinegeist's Uncle](#) provides surprising nutty and toasty depth in the usually light-flavored English Mild style.

BUT MAN CANNOT LIVE ON BEER ALONE...

EXPLORE NORTHSIDE RESTAURANTS



While beer is everywhere at the Rock and Roll Carnival, food is a bit less prevalent on the grounds of the event. But James Heller-Jackson, long-time volunteer at the carnival and member of the Northside Community Council, explained that this situation isn't due to a lack of demand: "We offer vendor space to any of the food businesses in Northside, and the fact is we usually only get one, because the rest of them are turning away customers at their doors!" Most area restaurants are simply too busy with the influx of visitors for the weekend's festivities to set up a second storefront at Hoffner Park. The exception to this rule is [N.Y.P.D. Pizza](#), which sponsors the carnival and manages to churn out massive numbers of pies to feed hungry fans.

To bolster the edible offerings, Heller-Jackson has reached out to Cincinnati's thriving food truck industry. He said with a smile that the first year the trucks served the carnival was "a limited success"; again, the issue wasn't with demand. "I don't think those food trucks realized how much food they were going to sell, and a lot of them sold out," he recounted. Now, truck owners have a more realistic view of the feeding frenzy that ensues at the event, and as many as eight plan to set up shop on this year's 4th of July weekend.

Among the trucks likely to be in attendance are [Waffo](#), advertised as "Cincinnati's premier waffle truck"; [Hungry](#), a sandwich-focused establishment hailing from Chesterton, Indiana; and [Red Sesame](#), which specializes in Korean barbeque served in fun formats such as tacos and hot dogs.

Those who wander from the carnival to explore Northside itself are faced with an even greater number of enticing options. Highlights include [Melt](#), a vegetarian/veg-

WAFFO TRUCK



MENU AT MELT



an-friendly café; [Django Western Taco](#), which offers affordably gourmet Mexican; [Blue Jay Restaurant](#), a longstanding purveyor of classic American diner fare; and [Ruth's Parkside Cafe](#), a contemporary vegetable-centric eatery in the historic [American Can Company Building](#).

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

TOMMY RUEFF



Although the Rock and Roll Carnival started as an adult-oriented event, many of the adults that attended in the early years have started to raise families of their own. Now these parents want to bring their children to the festivities, and [Happen Inc.](#) has stepped in to keep them engaged. The nonprofit, founded by Tommy Rueff in 1999 and recently moved to Northside, offers free art activities to children and parents alike. From crafting action figures out of spare parts in the Toy Lab to making summertime pinwheels, kids at the carnival have much to experience.

CREATIVITY RUN RAMPANT



Rueff's mission is all about creativity, making Happen Inc. a perfect complement for kids at the Rock and Roll Carnival. "We build art awareness, sharpen basic art skills, and ignite a child's creative energy while strengthening both the family structure and the community as a whole," he says about the organization's goals.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

It takes a ton of volunteers and all of their associated elbow grease to prepare for the arrival of bands and fans at the Rock and Roll Carnival. One of the most loyal hands in the volunteer corps, Lora Jost, spoke about her enthusiasm at [Tantrum](#), a chic urban boutique. Appropriately enough, this volunteer extraordinaire was watching over the shop for a friend, another example of how Northside's community bonds run deep.

Jost explained that significant set up and clean up happens for the carnival "before the beer shows up." Her vision for the Rock and Roll Carnival is to create "the biggest production possible," a showcase for "everything and anything that's cool about Cincinnati." Although most volunteers are Northside residents, the carnival happily takes any hands it can get; as Jost believes, "everyone can be an ambassador of Northside!" Whether for volunteers or attendees, Jost emphasized that the "zip code does not matter."

Several days before the Rock and Roll Carnival begins, volunteers string countless lights by hand to create the ultimate inviting vibe in Hoffner Park. Once the bands arrive, these volunteers move into action all over the carnival. Those with the gift of making great first impressions staff the volunteer check-in tables, where they issue t-shirts and job assignments to other volunteers. Volunteers over 21 can serve at the beer token and wristband booths, as well as at pouring stations. Helpers not old enough to pour beer typically serve as "floaters," who roam the carnival while taking care of vital tasks such as ice delivery and light trash removal.

After the event concludes, the community relies on the persistent passion of the volunteers to put Hoffner Park back together again. All of the carefully strung lights must be put back into storage, along with all of the electrical equipment that powers the music and beer. It's a big job, and without the incredible support of its volunteers, the Rock and Roll Carnival could never have reached its current success.

**VOLUNTEERS AT THE ROCK AND ROLL
CARNIVAL PUT IN COUNTLESS HOURS
"BEFORE THE BEER SHOWS UP"**

Jost's personal goal over the 4th of July holiday is to hug 100 people; she got in the first pair toward that goal a couple of months early after finishing her interview. Jost summed up her infectious love for Northside (or, as she affectionately references it, "Mayberry," after the home of the [Andy Griffith Show](#)) and its Rock and Roll Carnival as she exclaimed, "there is no job I won't do!"



Jost and the rest of the Carnival's volunteer legions have strong backing from organizations throughout Northside. The Rock & Roll Carnival is sponsored by the [Northside Business Association](#), which was organized in 1907 to promote Northside's assets and leverage the resources of its businesses. The single, broadly inclusive membership requirement listed on the association's website is to have the "good of the community at heart."

The efforts of the Northside Business Association largely created the conditions needed for a big, walkable community event like the Rock and Roll Carnival. One of the group's most important accomplishments was obtaining historical protection for key buildings throughout Northside. Traditional urban renewal focuses on the demolition of old structures, which can rob a neighborhood of its character and walkability. In the words of James "Jim" Swafford, the president of the association, those changes would have amounted to "knocking the teeth from a nice smile."

Now, Northside's main business district is protected on the [federal historic register](#) and boasts a thriving commercial renaissance. Stretching northward along Hamilton Avenue from Blue Rock Road to Chase Avenue, the area includes a surprisingly large array of enterprises for its size. Bars such as [Northside Tavern](#), coffeehouses such as [Sidewinder Coffee](#) and [Collective Espresso](#), and hip specialty stores such as [Spun Bicycles](#), [Galaxie Skate Shop](#), [Market Side Mercantile](#), and [Northside Grange Pet & Urban Farm Supply](#) do bustling business thanks to the preservation of Northside's authenticity.

HAMILTON AVENUE



THE COMMUNITY IS MEANT TO BE “A PLACE WHERE ARTISTS CAN LIVE AND NOT STARVE”

Over the aromas of fresh coffee at Collective Espresso, Oliver “Ollie” Kroner, a recent Northside transplant and president of the [Northside Community Council](#), discussed how Northside's leaders foster the vibe underlying the Rock and Roll Carnival. The community is very consciously meant to be “a place where artists can live and not starve.” Property and business costs are low, making it easy for creative entrepreneurs to try their hands at new projects. In a striking example, Kroner explained that “a liquor license in Northside is \$2500, versus in the city where it's \$30,000.” This blend of creativity and entrepreneurship comes through in Northside's ability to draw both “the lunch crowd” and people after a “hard-partying nightlife.”

THE PLACE TO BE FOR THE 4TH

Kroner summarized the Rock and Roll Carnival as “a celebration of freedom, which can mean different things to different people.” To Northsiders, it means embracing creativity and nurturing the atmosphere that makes expression possible. The carnival displays a “kaleidoscope of America,” soundtracked to brazenly independent music and accompanied by the best craft beer and food Cincinnati has to offer. Together with the spectacle of the 4th of July Parade, the Rock and Roll Carnival offers an unforgettable weekend to anyone with a thirst for freedom.



MARCHING TO A DIFFERENT BEAT

