

## July 4th Celebration

The Fourth of July celebration has a 60 year old tradition of community participation in Urbandale.

Virginia (Ginny) Olmsted Campbell tells how her father "Mugs" Olmsted in 1953 helped organize a street dance for young people at 70th and Douglas. A juke box was rolled out from a neighboring restaurant for music, and Mugs wired it so it could be played without adding coins.

The following year the American Legion began backing the dance. There are not specific records for how else the town celebrated, but an account in the local newspaper, "Urbandale News" in 1955 gives quite a schedule of planned activities. The American Legion was sponsoring a parade with prizes for the best floats, pet parade, best trimmed bike, horse and rider, etc. Legionnaires were to have a color guard and veterans were asked to put on any or part of their uniform. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were also invited to march in the parade in uniform. The parade started at 70th and Roseland, went up 70th to Prairie and ended at Lions Park.

Other events during the day included foot races, horseshoe pitching, pony rides, a softball game pitting Lions Club members and representatives of the volunteer fire department and the American Legion. More than 80 people gathered for a picnic potluck in the park.

In 1956 there was mention also of a rolling pin throw, three-legged race, sack race, high jump, and baseball game. A queen contest was also organized. People could vote for their favorite candidate by putting money in a jar. Linda Reynolds was selected queen and received a luggage set.

By the 1960's the celebration was expanded over several days and midway rides were scheduled. Other events in 1965 were a UHS band concert, square dance, talent show, and a teen disco dance in the all purpose room at Olmsted School.

In 1976 the July 4th celebration was tied to the Bicentennial. There was an Arts and Crafts Show, Miss Urbandale Pageant, AAU 5-mile road run, Jaycee Auction, and a patriotic musical performed by Meredith Drive Reformed Church.

A small scale fireworks launching had been added. Originally a bucket was passed around by volunteers in Lions Park in the late afternoon for contributions, but usually less than \$500 was collected. Merchants were then asked to donate. The displays had varying success. One year fireworks damaged the roof of the school.

In 1980 commemorative buttons were created and sold, though there was not much profit. The next year the buttons were numbered and prizes donated by merchants were awarded. This tradition has continued to raise funds.

The fireworks displays became more professional and were shot off north of the high school to be viewed from Lions Park and the surrounding area. Now thousands of dollars are raised for the well publicized display which is shot from the west side of Walker Johnston Park for safety reasons.

In recent years the three-day July 4th celebration has included a large midway and carnival, food stands, Teen Street Dance, Trash to Treasure Sale at the Senior Center, several band concerts in the Lions Park gazebo, a bike ride, foot races for children, 5K run, cribbage tournaments, soccer games, and a car show. An outstanding fireworks display is great ending to a wonderful Urbandale celebration.

A variety of performances and competitions have taken place through the years. The parade is now one of the largest July 4th events in Iowa attracting thousands with family reunions and out-of-town visitors. From the humble beginnings in the 1950's celebration of July Fourth remains an important part of Urbandale community life!