

# HILLIARD NORTHWEST NEWS

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## Solebrate! festival on hiatus for 2014

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Last year's inaugural Solebrate! Food and Music Festival lost money and now its organizers say a one-year break is needed to recruit and hire a director to promote the festival in 2015.

By that time, the event could have an entirely different look and even a different name.

Hilliard officials are exploring the possibility of combining Solebrate! with the city's flagship festival, the Old Hilliardfest Art and Street Fair, Mayor Don Schonhardt said.

Destination Hilliard, the city's marketing arm, has led the effort to establish and promote Solebrate!, which city and civic leaders meant to establish as a "signature event" for Hilliard along the lines of the Irish Festival in Dublin or the Tomato Festival in Reynoldsburg.

But the inaugural three-day event in June 2013 did not meet expectations.

Solebrate! lost about \$18,000, according to a report from Don Byerly, a member of the Solebrate! board of directors.

Still, Byerly said late last year in his post-event status report to City Council, the revenue loss and less-than-anticipated attendance -- 2,439 patrons during the third weekend in June -- was not unprecedented for inaugural festivals of a similar scale.

Christy Clark, executive director of Destination Hilliard and a member of the Solebrate! board of directors, said the board determined a director is needed to develop a "signature event."

"We also decided it was simply too late (to have a festival in 2014) as it takes upwards of a year to plan," Clark said.

Solebrate! board member Lynne Fasone said the organization is accepting applications for festival director through March 31.

Council President Nathan Painter said City Council fully supports Solebrate! and will fund the salary of the festival director.

The search for a festival director is separate from the possibility of merging Solebrate! with the annual street fair, established 29 years ago as Old Hilliard Day, Schonhardt said.

"Whether there is one festival or two festivals in Hilliard, either way we need a (festival) director," Schonhardt said.

Schonhardt said he has spoken with the Solebrate! board of directors and with the Hilliard Civic Association, which promotes the Old Hilliardfest Art and Street Fair, and both organizations expressed a willingness to consider merging into a single event.

"In many instances, cities with a successful signature event have but one ... and we are looking at whether that is possible in Hilliard," Schonhardt said.

Ed Daniel, chairman of the Hilliard Civic Association, said such discussions had occurred though there have been no renewed discussions in the past several months.

The Old Hilliardfest Art and Street Fair is scheduled the second weekend in September on Main Street, Daniel said.

Although known by different names in the past, the street fair has been held on the second Saturday in September since its founding.

Solebrate! was held the third weekend in June because the theme of the festival was tied to the summer solstice, on or about June 21 each year.

"But as a result of discussions (to combine the festivals) maybe we will come up with something different," Schonhardt said.

City and civic officials hope that many of the questions will be answered after a festival director is hired, Schonhardt said.

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