

## THINGS COME TOGETHER AT KENEY PARK

DIANE LEVICK, Courant Staff Writer. Hartford Courant. Hartford, Conn.: Aug 20, 2000.

Spirit and sun made a comeback Saturday for the 14th annual Keney Park Family Day Festival.

After a gray, rainy summer, old and young celebrated a renewal of pride in a park that some had once shunned, and the revival of hope for the city and family unity.

As festivalgoers swayed hips to a diverse blend of live music, youngsters played peek-a-boo with sheep and baby goats at a petting zoo and men pitched horseshoes beneath shady trees.

Eight-month-old Tyena Jarrett got her first pony ride, smiling and flailing her arms in excitement as an attendant held her firmly on the saddle.

"I remember the park when there was a time you couldn't come in here; there was a lot of crime in here," said Mechelle Davis of Hartford, wheeling her 2-year-old nephew Terrance Weaver-Bey in a stroller. "I see a very big change."

The two-day festival, which aims to promote family togetherness in a laid-back, fun atmosphere, is a show of teamwork and vision, said S. Elaine Johnson, audience developer for the event and president of Introspection Personified Foundation International Inc. in Hartford.

"This is a validation of unity," Johnson said. "They keep saying we have no unity. We must learn to appreciate unity when we see it."

The festival typically gets 25,000 visitors over a weekend, though last year it rained.

Johnson wasn't going to let that happen again. "I had a talk with God last night," she said Saturday, laughing. She said she told him that she'd work hard on the event rain or shine but that "there's no need to keep testing my loyalty."

The festival features something for every family member, from basketball and horseshoe competitions and paddle boating, to crafts and toy booths piled high with inflated Pokemon figures and with pink and blue dogs.

As aromas of Thai cooking mingled with those of jerk chicken and barbecued ribs, the Millennium All-Star Drill Team mixed dance and athletics to a pounding drum beat and the cheers of onlookers.

The festival "gives a lot of folks an opportunity to see old friends," said state Rep. Marie Kirkley-Bey, sitting in the hospitality tent and eyeing the tempting choices of cuisine. "No pressure, no specific time to be here or there. Just chill."

Attendance at such events as the Amistad docking in Hartford, Mark Twain Days and the Keney Park festival, Kirkley-Bey said, shows "the city's coming together little by little."

The festival, sponsored by Family Day Festival Enterprises Inc., continues today in Keney Park at the end of Woodland Street from noon to 7 p.m. People are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets.