

FAMILY DAY FESTIVAL CROWD ENJOYS MUSIC, MAGIC AND MORE

JOHNNY MASON, Courant Staff Writer. Hartford Courant. Hartford, Conn.: Aug 23, 1999.

Six-year-old Michael Nails seemed mesmerized by Bonaparte, a magician attempting to turn several pieces of orange paper to cash Sunday at the 14th Annual Keney Park Family Day Festival.

Before placing the paper into a velvet bag, Bonaparte told the kids that he had come from the purple planet Quylar, and thus had no concept of money. But, he said, if they repeated the magic words "haba, habba, habba," he would surely grant their wish.

After first pulling out a white sock, Bonaparte again reached inside the bag. This time, he yanked out two \$10 bills and two ones.

Holding the bills in front of Michael's nose, Bonaparte told him he was about to reward him by giving him a tip.

"Stay in school and study hard," Bonaparte said, pulling back the bills and sticking them in his pants pocket.

The festival, billed to promote family unity, may have taught young Michael never to trust a magician again. Nonetheless, the annual two-day event survived some rough rainy weather to once again prove to be a fun time for all.

"This is a wonderful cultural expression," said musician Alvin Carter Sr. "I consider this a big family reunion of people I haven't seen in the past year."

Family Day is a free African American festival that promotes community pride in north Hartford while bringing families closer together through activities, recreational field games, music, arts and crafts, health and human services exhibits and food, said Charles Christie, president of Family Day Enterprises Inc., which produced this year's event.

When members of the Friends of Keney Park decided not to sponsor the event this year, Christie, a former president of the park group, volunteered to help organize the two-day festival.

To host the event this summer, Christie and several other volunteers raised nearly \$43,000 over the past six months, with more than half the money coming

from Fleet Bank.

"For us it was important the annual event continued. You can't lose it, you can't pause it, you can't stop it," Christie said. "The real diehards will come out to support it rain or shine."

Food booths offered barbecued ribs, Jamaican meat patties, Caribbean jerk chicken, fried fish, rib sandwiches and plenty of burgers and hot dogs.

The booths were arranged in a circle, with the bandstand at the far end of the park.

The alcohol-free event featured more than 45 vendors offering fresh fruit, arts and crafts, African clothes, and wood carvings by a Bronx, N.Y., company, Innovators of African Art & Jewelry.

Debra Glass, 22, stood outside Kallama Omni's African art and jewelry tent, where she and several others were eyeing several pocketbooks made from coconuts.

"I think this history is important for everyone," she said.