

Black History Month parade introduces block party

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The Durham VOICE

North Carolina's Annual Black History Month Parade has partied its way down Fayetteville Street past NCCU's campus for nearly 20 years. But the 16th anniversary of the event brought something new: a block party.

Phyllis Coley, the CEO and publisher of Spectacular Magazine, as well as the main organizer of the parade, thought adding the block party would bring more young people to the scene and give families and observers more things to do.

"We wanted more people to come and enjoy themselves, so we put a party every block in four parking lots along Fayetteville Street," Coley said.

And enjoy themselves they did.

Music blasted from DJ booths. Food trucks opened for business next to T-shirt vendors. Inflatable slides, obstacle courses and bounce houses provided fun for people of all ages.

Crowds milled around the parking lots at Fayetteville Street Elementary School, Church's Chicken, NCCU's student union, and Brant Street. Girl Scouts selling cookies set up shop between parties to catch passers-by.

Several students from NCCU ventured to the block party outside the student union, some for the first time.

Marielle Gabriele, 21, a junior family and consumer sciences major at NCCU,



The Research Triangle Charter Academy Pearls Auxillary was one of many groups entertaining parade-goers. (Staff photo by Kenzie Cook)

had never been to the Black History Month Parade before. After learning about the block party from a friend, she decided to check it out.

"I didn't know it before because I guess I was never really involved as much, but being here now and talking to people... it's actually more exciting," Gabriele explained.

While the block parties were entertaining parade-goers, those involved in the parade were lining up at W. G. Pearson Elementary school. Two of the featured marching bands representing NCCU and Research

Triangle Charter Academy lined up along the side of the road, practicing their parade tunes and dances. The Pearls Auxiliary Team of RTCA practiced their routines on the opposite side of the street.

The five dancers in Pearls enjoy performing in the Black History Month Parade, even if they haven't yet grasped the importance of the occasion..

Jordyn Jackson, one of the RTCA Pearls, said, "A parade is a parade to me, 'cause you're supposed to go perform and dance hard in any parade, so there's really no difference."

Some parents of these RTCA students hoped being involved in the parade would help them come to understand the impact of Black History Month.

"A lot of times the kids either aren't paying attention or don't know what's going on, they only know they're here to perform," said Ceara Lucas, 31, a mother of one of the Pearls. "But I know for RTCA, they teach them the meaning behind Black History and the different projects they do during February."

The parade began at noon—an hour after the block parties—with veterans, marching bands and church and school groups. At the very front of the parade, Coley herself waved from the sunroof of an SUV.

Even after the parade ended, the block parties continued full blast for a couple more hours as crowds thinned out and people escaped the cold.



Phyllis Coley, the main organizer of this year's Black History Month Parade, leads the event down Fayetteville Street on Saturday, Feb. 3. (Staff Photo by Kenzie Cook)