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Pan African Festival moves to Tattnall Square Park, gets wet

Vickey Parker wasn't going to let a little rain spoil her visit to Macon. Before a small crowd huddled under the Gospel Tent at Tattnall Square Park on Saturday, Parker sang out.

"All I want you to do is open up the floodgates of heaven and let it rain," she sang. The weather was in perfect harmony.

Parker was one of about 50 members of the St. Galilee Baptist Church of Sandersville who rode a chartered bus to Macon to take part in the Weekend in the Park, part of the Tubman African American Museum's annual Pan African Festival.

After 13 years at Central City Park, the Weekend in the Park moved to Tattnall Square Park this year. Steady rain in the early afternoon dampened the debut.

By late afternoon, the sun emerged and the sparse crowd grew. People came to listen to live music, see colorful stilt walkers, shop for African-themed crafts and sample plentiful food offerings. Some tents sheltered representatives of nonprofits such as the Georgia Medical Care Foundation, which distributed information about diabetes.

Vivian Jones, who came with Parker and other members of St. Galilee's Women of Virtue ministry, said she was impressed by her first trip to the festival.

"I like it," Jones said. "It's creative. It's something different. It's where you can connect with the African experience."

Tubman Director of Education and Outreach Anita Ponder said she was pleased by the way the festival was shaping up, despite the initially soggy conditions.

“I think this is going to work out real good for us,” Ponder said. “The whole purpose of the festival is to be an outreach to the community, and this is conducive to that. It’s bordered by neighborhoods and it’s bordered by the schools.”

She referred to Mercer University and Alexander II Elementary School, which face the park.

The Weekend in the Park moved to Tattnall Square Park because of a grant from the College Hill Alliance.

Over at the tent set up by Joan’s Caribbean Cuisine, James Steele of Atlanta attended to a charcoal grill loaded down with jerk chicken.

“So far, so bad,” Steele said, when asked how the festival was turning out for him.

He wasn’t talking about the weather. He was talking about the flat tire he got in Forsyth on the way down to Macon.

“We were late getting started, but now we’re ready to roll,” Steele said as the aroma of spicy chicken wafted over the park. “The rain won’t bother us. People are gonna come.”

The Weekend in the Park continues today from noon to 7 p.m. Admission is free.