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April 13, 2007

COVER STORY

Madison's 'Miracle Mile' seeks further revival

By Jason Thomas
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Memories of Madison Avenue's bustling past popped to life as officials detailed plans for a Labor Day parade aimed at spurring economic development in an area known decades ago as the Miracle Mile.



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Jeff Cardwell discusses plans for the Miracle Mile Parade along Madison Avenue on Sept. 1. He announced plans Wednesday for the event, whose theme is "Back to the '50s." - Jason Thomas / The Star

Miracle on Madison Parade

The 1.2-mile route will begin at 1 p.m. Sept. 1 at the corner of Troy Avenue and East Street, head west on Troy to Madison Avenue, then travel north on Madison to Southern Avenue. The parade will end at Southern and East.

The parade is expected to last 90 minutes.

Officials are planning for 75 entries; 24 slots have been filled.

Categories are dignitaries/officials; children/youth; civic clubs/government agencies/organizations; business/commercial. There will be seven award classes.

More entrants and up to 150 volunteers are being sought. For more information or an entry form, go to <http://www.gatewaybusinessalliance.com/>.

the mile strip on Madison.

The stretch of Madison between Southern and National avenues will take center stage during the Miracle Mile Parade set for Sept. 1 – exactly 50 years after the last parade there.

Details were announced Wednesday during a news conference at the Carpenters Union Hall on Madison Avenue.

A period of decline since the strip's heyday of the 1950s and 1960s – remember Key West Shrimp House? – has given way to a wave of economic development aimed at restoring Madison Avenue to its famed past.

"People are coming together for the common goal of raising up the great spirit of our community and the rebirth of the Miracle Mile," said Jeff Cardwell, president of the Gateway Business Alliance, a grass-roots economic development group that has developed a five-phase plan to redevelop the strip.

"It's a part of history in the making."

Spurred by an \$8 million renovation of Madison Avenue by the city of Indianapolis completed last year, the alliance envisions a street with tree-lined medians, new sidewalks, bike trails and decorative traffic signals.

"Since (the renovation), more than \$25 million of private investment has been committed to this area with the rebirth of new corporations and new companies coming to the Miracle Mile," said Cardwell, president of Cardwell Do-It Best Home Center, situated within

The parade's theme, "Back to the '50s," harkens back to the strip's heyday when pedestrians strolled the corridor to visit its many businesses and hangouts, such as the Tee Pee Restaurant.

Ray Compton, chief executive officer of Compton Strategies, who has worked for pro sports teams, views the parade as a way to bring the Southside together.

"When I see people coming together and wanting to make a difference here on the Southside, to me, that's what it's all about," he said during the conference. "I think this is a tremendous opportunity to kick off the revitalization of this important community."

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Events like a parade help strengthen neighborhoods, said Margaret Lawrence Banning, of the city's Department of Metropolitan Development.

"The most important thing is the energy that comes with creating an identity for the neighborhood or, in this case, re-creating that identity," Banning said.

Officials envision residents from across the area participating.

"The parade is really a catalyst to get people to come back," said Mark Bowell, parade director and a member of the alliance. "It builds on the energy of what we're trying to accomplish, both from a community perspective and from an economic development perspective."

Call Star reporter Jason Thomas at (317) 444-2708.



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