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## First Portland Block Party a great success

### Organizers estimate 1,000 people in downtown for event

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PORTLAND - A new event from the Portland Main Street organization proved to be very successful.

The first Portland Downtown Block Party took place May 15 on Kent Street in downtown Portland. The event offered a variety of activities, including a classic car show, live entertainment, softball and kickball tournaments and a balloon release. Patrick Reagan, Portland Main Street manager, told members of the Portland City Council that the event exceeded the expectations of the organizers.

"We had over 200 cars in the car show and over 1,000 people in the downtown," said Reagan.

"It was just a fantastic event brought together by a lot of people to show off our great downtown. Everyone involved in planning and putting on this event should be proud."

James Espinosa, owner of Maria's Tacos and a member of the Main Street Promotions and Marketing Committee, agreed with that assessment.

"This was just a great day," said Espinosa. "The cars brought in a lot of people not only from Portland, but also from Lansing and many surrounding communities. This event was designed to promote the downtown and provide a family atmosphere and it did just that."

The event also included a taekwondo demonstration by the Portland Black Belt Academy, a food court featuring various Portland businesses, face painting and sidewalk art, as well as a display from the Portland Rodeo Days that included mechanical bull riding and Herman, the longhorn bull.

The Block Party also proved to be a good one for downtown businesses.

"I have heard a lot of gratitude and a lot of thank yous from the downtown," said Espinosa.

"I know we had a record day of sales at Maria's Tacos and had a lot of first-time customers who said they would be back. And at one point, Chocolate Moose had a line outside of their door. So it was a good event for businesses

"What helped in that regard was the food court," added Espinosa. "At a lot of places I have been to, the customers buy their food and then have to find a place to sit. Someone here came up with the idea to put tables and chairs right by the food court and gave visitors a place to sit after purchasing their food. It helped create the family atmosphere that we wanted."

Espinosa also credited the businesses for making the event a success.

"I am proud of the sponsors that we had, especially the downtown businesses," said Espinosa. "A lot of them put up significant money to help put on this event. We also had great support at the last minute when four businesses stepped forward to offer prizes for the car show." Reagan said the Main Street members are already thinking about the 2011 Block Party.

"We are already planning on how we can make it a little bit bigger and a little bit better next year."

Espinosa said organizers are being careful about how the Block Party grows.

"This first year gave us something successful to build on," said Espinosa. "However, we have to work within the logistics of the downtown area. We don't want to expand too far because we want to keep people in the downtown. As it was we already had some growing pains this year. We were looking to stay within three blocks and it grew to five blocks."

Espinosa said future events may include using the boardwalk and rivertrail near the downtown area.

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