

Orange ready to present Caribbean festival Sunday

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

The city of Orange will highlight the cultures of the West Indies when it hosts its ninth annual Caribbean Festival.

Sunday afternoon's festival inside Monte Irvin Orange Park is part of the city's Summer Cultural Arts Series. City officials said this year's festival features the musical sounds and food of the Caribbean islands, including entertainment by the Fasana Band, Aman Tassa Group and the Steel Band Explosion Group.

Anyone in Orange interested in experiencing a bit of Caribbean culture is being urged to come out and spend the day in the park. Roger Mark, the manager of Mandeville restaurant in the old Chronicle building along South Essex Avenue, said he will attend.

"We've been here in Orange for a little over a year now and I didn't know that the city held an annual Caribbean festival. Now that I do know, I will be there," said Mark. "We will definitely be a part of it, because it will showcase the restaurant and the Orange community."

Because Orange has a sizable large Caribbean immigrant community, said Mark, he expects the festival will get a larger turnout than the city's recent jazz festival that occurred outside his restaurant. That event was just as much about promoting the city's burgeoning restaurant and entertainment business community as it was about entertaining residents and visitors of all ages, said Mark, and Sunday's festival is designed to accomplish the same thing.

The Caribbean Festival is part of the city's cultural heritage celebration summer series. It began with the jazz festival and, last weekend, the city had its Latin festival and concert, which celebrated Orange's fast-growing Hispanic and Latino populations.

This weekend, city officials and others said, is going to be all about Caribbean history and culture.

"We want a big turnout this weekend and we want the Orange residents to support the concert series because we're in the middle of a recession and there's nothing else to do and it costs money to put these kinds of events on and we want the people to enjoy it," said Vernon Rampersad, owner of the Island Barbecue restaurant. "We want people from all over Essex County to come out and support our Orange festival."

Rampersad said that he enjoys living in Orange because "it's beautiful here." He said the city has a big community of Caribbean people and Trinidadians: "If you go out to the park on almost any day, you will see people playing football, soccer or cricket.

"We brought our culture here to Orange and it's here to stay," said Rampersad. "It will never die and we want to share it with people. West Indian and Caribbean people are very friendly and we will be welcoming anyone who comes with open arms."

Hawkins said he has made the promotion of arts, cultural and recreational activities during the summer a priority and the Caribbean festival promises those in attendance a "fun-filled day with a taste of the rich Caribbean cultural heritage, both local and international."

In addition, personnel from health and social service providers will be available for residents to meet, said Darrell Holcomb, director of the Department of Community Services, which includes the Division of Cultural Affairs.

"One of the things that makes Orange very special is the diversity of our community," Hawkins said. "Each year, we celebrate that diversity by holding ethnic festivals to give people the opportunity to meet and mingle with those of different ethnic groups and to experience their cultures."

For more information, contact the Division of Cultural Affairs at 973- 266- 4085.
