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Thursday, JUL 19, 2007

Celebrate Life: good cause, good turnout

Chad Rutan, Ohio State University Student
13.JUL.06



BARBERTON – Looking at the positive aspects of a negative situation is an ability not many people have. Taking the death of a family member and turning it into a celebration of life is even more rare.

Mark Canfora, with his driving faith and personality, did just that. The Celebrate Life festival was born.

This was the first year for the festival. A partnership between Canfora and Mike Guarnieri, pastor of The Father’s House church, raised the funds and brought this whole ordeal together. A horde of amusements were scattered about Edgewood Park in Barberton last Saturday, including live music groups, basketball courts and tournaments, inflatable and regular jungle gyms and free food. From the smiling kids to the dancing adults, the whole park was teeming with a Christian vibe. Anywhere from 500 to 1,000 attendees were expected to join the celebration. Another festival is already in planning for next year.

Canfora’s 18-year-old son, Mark Jr., committed suicide in Edgewood Park. Instead of it being unbearably hard to come back to that site, Canfora finds strength and perseverance in this festival. He considers it “sacred ground.”

“Through this Celebrate Life Festival, people will realize that God is a loving God. That we should be grateful for all his blessings in our life,” Canfora said, before his eyes grew misty and wandered far off. “My son beat me home... I miss my son, but I know when I see him again I won’t remember any of this pain.”

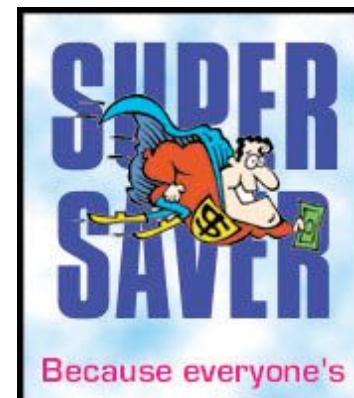
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