

Parade, Flag Day Brought Thousands Together in Peace and Celebration.

By Bill Forry

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A sea of blue and red flags blossomed along a major Boston thoroughfare – and then re-appeared days later on City Hall Plaza- as Boston Haitian’s celebrated their heritage in grand fashion last month.

More than 10,000 people turned out for the first annual Haitian American Unity Parade on Mother’s Day on Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester. Based on the unprecedented success of the afternoon event, organizers say the parade is likely to become a traditional celebration of Haitian heritage in the Boston area.

Dozens of local organizations and churches joined the ranks of the parade, which began on schedule at 2:00pm in Mattapan Square and followed a two mile route to Franklin Field. A carnival atmosphere prevailed as thousands watched the column process down the thoroughfare under sunny skies. Many more crowded in front of a reviewing stand near Talbot Avenue, where honorary parade marshal Rep. Marie St. Fleur delivered remarks to the celebrants.

Eno Mondesir, who served as Chairman of the Haitian- Americans United, Inc.(HAU)- the organization that spearheaded the parade- said that the parade’s success exceeded expectations.

“It brought together Haitians and Haitian- Americans, as well as friends from all social strata, religious faith or denominations, “ says Mondesir. “It has also attracted Haitians from all political convictions, which is unheard of. We have seen children, young Haitians, Haitian-Americans, and adults walk Blue Hill Avenue with pride and awe.”

According to Mondesir, one of the goals was to rekindle the spirit of unity among people of Haitian descent.

“We realize that one event cannot undo the mentality of the people; however, it can serve the foundation for more consistent or systematic endeavors,” says Mondesir.” These two events have also helped men and women, young and old, in the community to recapture the spirit of civic responsibilities. After the parade, we saw people walking the street, picking up whatever trash was left behind.

“Another remarkable accomplishment in this parade was the fact that no one, absolutely, no one got hurt,” said Mondesir.” Over 10,000 people gathered and celebrated their heritage without any incidence of violence. This is acknowledged by the Boston Police Department. That gives me a sense of pride! We indeed can organize ourselves peacefully. We have done all the time, although that may go unnoticed for many reasons, but the facts are there.”

Mondesir and the HAU group were also the organizers behind the May 18 celebration of Haitian Flag Day at City Hall Plaza, which drew another large, flag-waving crowd. The event included the participation of hundreds of young Haitian students, some of whom carried banners representing their schools.

Mondesir said that the cooperation of Mayor Thomas Menino and the City of Boston was indispensable in organizing both events. Mondesir also credits Patti Papa, in the Mayor’s Office of Special Events and Tourism, and Menino’s Caribbean liaison Yves Salomon, along with Police Commissioner Paul Evans, Superintendent Bobbie Johnson, Deputy Superintendent Rafael Ruiz,

“Lastly but not least, we send our sincere appreciation to the community of Mattapan, Dorchester, Hyde Park and the surrounding for allowing us to celebrate our heritage,” said Mondesir.