

Manchester Message column, August 2021

Mike Clement

Unchained Melody

As I write this column, the City's Fourth of July Party is over. There are a lot of images that are still with me from this very special American holiday that this City celebrates so well. I was working the Veterans Commission tent at the evening concert and firework. We were offering veterans a free coupon for a drink or a sandwich. Fifty+ veterans introduced themselves to us and allowed the City to say, "thank-you for your service."

From where I was, my view of the crowd and the band was awesome. I think I had the best view in the park for the birthday gathering. The band, Butch Wax & the Hollywoods, is an outstanding regional band with a big following. They "cover" a variety of music with strong vocalists. Their musical selections on the Fourth of July included so many that we could sing along with. It felt like a party. I knew most of their music.

Then, they performed the great Righteous Brothers hit from 1965, "Unchained Melody." It sounded to me like a near-perfect version. The large, large audience, en masse, stood up, in place, and started slow-dancing with their spouses and partners. I saw that these hundreds of residents and visitors, while there to celebrate a holiday, were, as importantly, happy to be amongst their loved ones, friends and the larger community!

Closer to me, I watched a "boomer" couple (my generation), slow dance to that song. They were enjoying the music. They ended their dance with a soft kiss. This image of life, amongst so many other folks, whom we desire and need to be with, was an affirming statement that, somehow, life, for vaccinated folks, was going to move forward with promise and normalcy. That song, Unchained Melody, and the crowd's reaction signaled that we were feeling the triumph of freedom again.

As the evening grew darker, the crowd at the Fourth of July concert continued to grow until, near the launch of fireworks, there were about 4,000 of us present. That's a huge crowd for the park. There were thousands, perhaps ten thousand more, watching the fireworks from Manchester homes, businesses, church and school parking lots. The fireworks exploded brilliantly and loudly for a half-hour. After a surprising, double fireworks finale, there was disappointment that the afternoon and evening was coming to a close. It was such a wonderful afternoon and evening. It felt so good to be together! Our job, our role, is to ensure that our community continues forward with such solidarity, purpose and togetherness.

Earlier that morning of July Fourth, before any concert or crowd gathered in the park, I received a text message from a Manchester friend, whose life began in China. He sent me this message, "So proud to be an American. Happy 4th of July!" For me, his message of awesome pride in this

country and its values reminds me (us) that our freedom and liberties must not be taken for granted. I sent a text back to my friend, "I agree! And, I'm glad you live in Manchester and are a friend of mine!"

On the Fourth of July, Manchester came together in our diverse richness. First, we celebrated as Americans. Then, took time to slow dance to Unchained Melody. And, finally, our hearts raced as dozens of fireworks shells exploded simultaneously. I'm glad we live in Manchester! And, I'm glad we are friends.

Our next party is Manchester Homecoming

While the top portion of this column is reflecting on the past Fourth of July celebration, this City is fortunate to host a second party that will equal, or exceed the spirit of the July party. Next up is Homecoming! There is considerable information about Homecoming in this issue of the Manchester Message. From carnival rides, non-stop music and the best small-town parade in America, Manchester's Homecoming is the weekend of gathering together safely and valuing the atmosphere and community of this City. Homecoming is a special weekend. I hope to see you there!