

11th annual Blessed Culture and Sports Festival at Barrytown

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BARRYTOWN, NY – With nothing but sunshine and blue skies for its entire run, the 11th annual Blessed Culture and Sports Festival (BCSF) held at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) from August 5-9 couldn't be described with any other word but “blessed.”

By all accounts, this, the sixth collaboration between UTS and BCSF was the smoothest organized and best attended festival so far. Staff members from both groups praised the event for the number of participants and for the professionalism each exhibited in the preparation and running of the festival.

“This is a great event,” said Dr. Michael Mickler, Vice President for Administration at UTS. “It is one of the main events we hold every year along with the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) workshops, and the GPA graduation in June. This year the sport festival has been very smooth and there are more participants.”

Dr. Mickler's sentiments were echoed by BCSF volunteer Eva Clark, in charge of finances, who is working her sixth Sports Festival, “With all the grass roots volunteers, this is just a wonderful

event. UTS is very helpful and supportive. The collaboration with UTS gets better every year.”

Perhaps Jonathan Stupple, UTS grounds coordinator, summed it up when he said, “This is the best Sports Festival so far. The best-run, and the people are really nice; very well-behaved.”

With a record-setting crowd of attendees and participants on Saturday - Family Day - the expanded festival program had literally something for everyone: plenty of room for parking and setting up tents; an Artists Village; booths offering various types of foods – Eastern, Western, organic, home grown; even the age-old cookout staples of hot dogs, hamburgers and potato chips. Most of the sports teams had set up their own catering tents to feed the many athletes competing in the day-long events, and the aroma of food cooking wafted through the air from early morning until long into the night.

“This was really a great event,” said Clark, “We broke a record for attendance on Family Day, there were over 700 people.”

This was due, in part, to the added Family Day offerings of a sprinkler and water slide for the children, face painting and large bouncy castles to jump up and down in.

“We wanted to provide something for the families with young children,” said Jin Kwon Kim (UTS'10), founder and coordinator of BCFS. “This is really for people in their 30's and 40's who have children and like to attend but don't participate in sports anymore.”

Along with the expansion of Family Day, an addition to the festival is the Artist's Village, where artists displayed and sold their arts and crafts.

Kim explained that he didn't want the festival to be just about sports, and as the event evolves and expands he wants to include as many people as possible, especially those who do not participate in the various sporting events.

“Whether you're an artist or an athlete,” said Kim, “you have to invest hours of dedication and effort... your soul really. It doesn't matter if it's a paintbrush or field or stage. It offers recognition and appreciation of that effort. How different is that from offering a prayer?”

Teams came from states (and countries) near and far including New York, New Jersey, Florida, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, New England, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota,

Illinois, Texas, California and Washington, as well as separate teams from Bridgeport, Philadelphia, the District of Columbia and Canada.



Days were filled with young men and women pitting their athletic prowess against one another in games of volleyball, basketball, soccer, ping pong, badminton, the Mudder's Trail ("tough mudder"), rock climbing, and the loudest and most enthusiastically contested event: Ultimate Frisbee!

Nights took on a whole different atmosphere as participants took part in Dance Night, Film Night, and a "Battle of the Bands" on Saturday night.

"This is such a talented community," said J. I., cultural coordinator, who was responsible for setting up all the evening programs. "We showed 4-5 short films that were made by different people for the event. The bands who are playing will be competing for recording studio time at the Manhattan Center in NYC."

Sporting events concluded on Sunday, with trophies being handed out to the winning teams and individuals during a closing ceremony later that afternoon. To the sound of enthusiastic cheering, the festival came to an end.

Although Kim commented that it may be time for him to "move on" and leave the work of organizing and running the festival to "younger people," he made clear his desire to return to UTS for many years to come when he spoke with Dr. Hugh Spurgin, President of UTS and said, "I cannot imagine BCFS doing this anywhere else."

