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Community comes together for Montrose Oktoberfest

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John Jordan of the German-American Brass Band lets his son two year-old Sean Jordan, play his trumpet during the 37th annual Montrose Oktoberfest. (Libby Cline / Glendale News Press / October 4, 2014)

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Photo Gallery: 37th annual Montrose Oktoberfest

By Alicia Banks, alicia.banks@latimes.com
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Growing up about 100 miles from Munich, it's little surprise that Claudia Splichal has been to the annual Oktoberfest in that Germany city that attracts hundreds of thousands of people.

But Saturday, she attended an American-spin on the tradition in Montrose. She watched as her 4-year-old son, A.J., catapulted himself into the air on a bungee/trampoline.

"I prefer this combination," Splichal said about the festival that not only celebrates her roots, but family togetherness.

PHOTOS: 37th annual Oktoberfest

Hundreds converged on Honolulu Avenue for the 37th Annual Oktoberfest, hosted by the Montrose-Verdugo City Chamber of Commerce. The festival offered authentic German food, beer for adults and a plethora of carnival-esque games. Throughout the day-long event, visitors gathered at multiple stages for varied entertainment, from German figure dancing to youth gymnastics.

And as Splichal has roots in Germany, so does Montrose. The first Oktoberfest was celebrated at Crescenta Valley Park, formerly called Hindenburg Park. German immigrants flocked to the foothills after World War II, bringing their culture and leading to many decades of Oktoberfest that has attracted up to 20,000 attendees, according to the chamber's website.

"We like to make it a community event," said Melinda Clarke, executive director of the Montrose-Verdugo City Chamber of Commerce. "It's a tradition to be here."

And it could become a tradition for Katrina Saroyan of Studio City. Families grinned at the accordion player as she walked down Honolulu Avenue. A brother and sister rushed to her side, asking their mother for a picture with the musician.

"Even some kids want to play the keys," Saroyan said with a smile. "It's so fun and festive. Everyone's happy."

As some parents snapped pictures of their children on a carousel, others gathered around a stage to hear songs from Franklin Magnet School students in the German Immersion program. Kindergarten through sixth-grade students sang about fall weather, to the days of the week, in German for a gathered crowd.

The performance marked a first for the school. Barbara Haynes, a teacher, said learning the language also happens outside the classroom's four walls.

"This makes them proud," said Haynes, who signaled the students to sing louder.

The rest of the afternoon ushered in more contests, from stein holding to children's costumes. The D'Oberlanders, a Bavarian dancing group based in Anaheim, performed alphorns, tuned cowbells and traditional figure dancing for the crowd. Stephan Regenfuss, a member who's German, considered the Montrose Oktoberfest another avenue to express his heritage.

"German immigrants have been a part of American history for hundreds of years," he said. "And this event has a community feel. It's nice."

Back at the trampoline, A.J. buried his face in his mother's side after finishing his turn. Long breaths escaped his mouth, but the day wasn't over for him and his mother. It was only the first ride of the day.

"This is great, even with it being hot outside," Splichal said laughing. "To see Oktoberfest celebrated here, it's nice. Germans like to celebrate."

The pair held hands as they walked past the carousel where dozens of rides and games waited.

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