

# Benstock! festival to honor Ben Callahan

10/7/17

Saturday event celebrates life of young music lover

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — Roughly 38 years ago, an audience of half a million gathered on a 600-acre lawn for a three-day event that would become widely regarded as a pivotal moment in music history.

The setting of this Saturday's Benstock at Nuzzo's Farm in Branford may be more modest. The number of concertgoers may be smaller, at least in comparison. But the mission of the music festival is, to the people who knew and loved Ben Callahan, the 10-year-old who died in July after drowning in the Branford River, just as monumental.

"We wanted to do something that would honor Ben's love both for life and music," said Cayla Florio, 19, one of the event organizers, whose brother played with Ben and his brothers. "We also wanted to do something his family would enjoy."

**"We wanted to do something that would honor Ben's love both for life and music. We also wanted to do something his family would enjoy."**

*Cayla Florio, one of the event organizers*

While the musical lineup is studded with local bands like Hitlist, The Steamrollers, and The Syndicate, which includes Paul Battle, Ben's bass guitar teacher, there won't be 32 groups taking the stage.

Then again, if Benstock, like Woodstock, was slated to last three days and nights instead of a single afternoon, there might have been. "A number of other bands reached out, they still are, but we've had to say no because there just wasn't enough time," Florio said.

As for the stage, it won't be rotating and it won't be immense. Unlike the 1969 event, there won't be 70-foot towers for speakers. A few Saturdays ago, a small army of guys that included Tony Nuzzo, Fuzz Florio and Dave Massey took the afternoon to hammer together a simple wooden platform.

Instead of, er, mushrooms and herb, there will be hamburgers and hot dogs from JJ's Food Truck, barbecue pulled pork sandwiches and chili cheese dogs from Shoreline Prime, and an ice cream truck.

No doubt, given the upbeat foot-stomping tunes featured by the bands performing on Saturday, there will be dancing, but perhaps less orgiastic; the event will be on private property, where no alcohol is allowed, according to Florio.

Of course, while Jimi Hendrix earned \$18,000 for his performance on Max Yasgur's dairy farm, each of those bands volunteered



Contributed photo

A poster featuring photos of Ben Callahan on display at the vigil in his honor on the Branford Green.

tine O'Connor, who put together every kind of gift basket — a lottery basket, a sports basket, and a movie basket, to name just a few. Not to mention contributing a life-size Jenga game, a life-size bowling game and a life-size checkerboard.

That's in addition to activities like face painting by Alecia, Curious Creatures featuring an array of reptiles and a presentation by the Coast Guard of New Haven about water safety.

"A lot of the PTA moms know how much Ben meant to their kids and families," Florio said. "It was a no-brainer for them to do all this."

All told, then, the event may seem small in stature. That's not unlike young Ben Callahan. But like Woodstock, his impact,

profound and far-reaching, is still being felt.

Benstock will take place from 1 to 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 7 at Nuzzo's Farm, 736 E. Main St., Branford. Cost is \$10, kids under 13 free. Bring blankets and chairs.

Lisa Reisman can be reached at [lisareisman27@gmail.com](mailto:lisareisman27@gmail.com).



Contributed photo

Ben Callahan, right, with his younger brother, Scout.

like Woodstock, was slated to last three days and nights instead of a single afternoon, there might have been. "A number of other bands reached out, they still are, but we've had to say no because there just wasn't enough time," Florio said.

As for the stage, it won't be rotating and it won't be immense. Unlike the 1969 event, there won't be 70-foot towers for speakers. A few Saturdays ago, a small army of guys that included Tony Nuzzo, Fuzz Florio and Dave Massey took the afternoon to hammer together a simple wooden platform.

Instead of, er, mushrooms and herb, there will be hamburgers and hot dogs from JJ's Food Truck, barbecue pulled pork sandwiches and chili cheese dogs from Shoreline Prime, and an ice cream truck.

No doubt, given the upbeat foot-stomping tunes featured by the bands performing on Saturday, there will be dancing, but perhaps less orgiastic; the event will be on private property, where no alcohol is allowed, according to Florio.

Of course, while Jimi Hendrix earned \$18,000 for his performance on Max Yasgur's dairy farm, each of those bands volunteered their services in order to benefit the Ben Callahan Foundation, set up by Ben's family to fund local charitable endeavors.

So did businesses like Leon James Hair Salon, Rain Wellness Spa and G-Zen Restaurant, along with P&M Deli, Dockside Restaurant and Little Miss Bradshaw boutique, all of which donated gift certificates for a raffle to end all raffles.

Likewise, the Sliney School PTA, led by Chris-

All told, then, the event may seem small in stature. That's not unlike young Ben Callahan. But like Woodstock, his impact,