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## 40,000 Rock Providence's Weekend Arts Festival

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza shimmied down Washington Street with tambourine. To kick off PVDFest's Saturday evening programming, he led a parade of performers to the event's main stage, in Kennedy Plaza.

Elorza was surrounded by local favorites, including the Extraordinary Rendition Band and Big Nazo characters, as well as artists visiting from around the world. Among them were members of the Grammy-nominated Puerto Rican band Plena Libre and 18-foot dinosaur stilt-walkers from the Netherlands, called Saurus.

"I want you all to dance in the streets and have a wonderful day," Elorza said.

By that time, revelers had already been shaking it on the sidewalks all afternoon on the second and most eventful day of PVD Fest. The free multicultural arts, entertainment and culture festival is being hosted downtown through Sunday by the City of Providence in conjunction with FirstWorks.

"The sun is out, people are having a good time, what better place is there to be?" said Paulette Dion, of Lincoln, as she moved her feet to the beat of Puerto Rico's bomba music.

Several city streets, including large parts of Washington and Westminster, were closed to traffic all day to make way for dozens of pop-up stages, street performers and food and alcohol vendors.

About 40,000 people attended the festival Saturday, estimated Providence Police Major Thomas Verdi. Around 7 p.m., he reported that there had been no major incidents requiring police attention.

"The behavior of the crowd has been fantastic," Verdi said. "It's been very manageable. People are excited and are enjoying themselves downtown."

The event offered a multi-sensory experience, with something different to see, hear, taste or smell at every step.

Festival-goers of all ages danced the Electric Slide in a parking lot, watched The Steel Yard blacksmith Willow Zietman forge metal on a trailer, and took in a performance by a knife-juggling, kilt-wearing unicyclist. There were also many pop-up bars and food vendors, selling things such as jerk chicken wings, tacos and watermelon margaritas.

The event included a kids' area in Burnside Park, with storytelling and puppet shows, visual art installations, and vendors from Providence Flea selling jewelry, antiques and housewares.

There was a strong multicultural aspect to the festival, with Spanish music and dancing a large part of the mix. Gisela Hijo de Dios came from the Dominican Republic to sing a short set on a small stage set up in a parking lot. The day also included main stage performers from as far away as Cuba and Ghana.

Event volunteers who were passing out maps said they talked to several attendees from out of state. "A lot of people have been asking me where is Washington Street, and we're standing on it, so I figure they're not from here," said volunteer Nichelle German, of East Providence. "And someone told me they were from Belgium."

Waiting in line for a frozen daiquiri, Jezer Albiani, 23, of Brockton, Massachusetts, said he stumbled upon the festival after he and a friend decided to go shopping in Providence for the day.

"Looking at all of the creative things to do here, I was stunned," he said. "I didn't even know that about Providence."

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