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Contact: Vanessa Elias, eliasvanessa5@gmail.com

**Wilton’s 2nd Annual Big Block Party Weekend**

**June 8-9, 2019**

Summer is coming and what better way to kick it off than an old fashioned block party! On the weekend of June 8-9, 2019 neighbors all over town will organize their own little celebrations during **Wilton’s 2nd Annual Big Block Party Weekend**. This initiative has a two pronged goal - connecting neighbors for face to face interaction and for creating more opportunity for children’s free play by families getting to know one another.

“In a town where zoning laws physically separate neighbors, it’s important to find ways to connect with our community. Block parties are a priceless way to get face to face with neighbors you might not otherwise get to meet and to strengthen bonds with the ones that you already know. I’m so impressed with the results of last year’s Big Block Party Weekend and can’t wait to organize one on my street,” remarked Andrea Topalian, Wilton resident since 2001 and founder of Wilton CT 411.

The theme of the block party weekend is “*Building community one block at a time”* and that is exactly what these get togethers accomplish. Last year’s inaugural program brought together over 1200 residents in approximately 40 block parties.

Many reported that the Wilton’s Big Block Party Weekend initiative was the push they needed to organize something, and were grateful to their block party captains for getting everyone together.

“We had our first block party in September. It was so much fun and we had an excellent turn out. I have lived on this street for many years and know most of the neighbors but it was great to meet the others and to all hang out together. We intend to do it again this summer. We even set up a FB page for our neighborhood,” commented Diane Sklar.

**Why host a block party?** The benefits are endless! Here are just a few reasons:

Top Reasons to have a Block Party

1. Meet and get to know your neighbors
2. Increase a sense of belonging in the community
3. Get outside, make friends and have fun - no excuses are needed to celebrate
4. Find neighborhood playmates for your children
5. Opportunity for face-to-face connection and conversation
6. Meet some of the long standing neighbors and learn about your community history
7. Decrease stress of snow days, storms and emergency situations
8. Create a neighborhood contact list

Community member Donna Savage reflected on her experience hosting a block party by saying, “It was fabulous to gather and reconnect older neighbors with newer neighbors and begin to form a new neighborhood vibe. We live in such a beautiful section of Wilton, aka “The Meadows” with a rich history. Everyone was so appreciative. I also realized during this process that there are several multi-generational families living in neighborhood.”

Many residents worry about the work involved, but it is easier than you think.

“We organized the block party with short notice and were pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to plan and how many people came. People of all ages responded and we met other families with kids that we would not have otherwise known. Everyone brought a snack to share and coolers with their drinks. We had tons of fun playing cornhole and the kids had a massive water balloon fight! They drenched the parents and really everyone got involved. We look forward to doing it again this year,” said Emily DuBrock of Thayer Pond Road.

If you’d like to be a Block Party Captain, the Free Play Taskforce created a summary of FAQs to get you started:

Block Party Captain How-To:

1. Keep it simple and low-key (try not to go overboard, it can make people feel the event is too much work)
2. Recruit another neighbor or two to help
3. Decide on a location (road, common space, or yard)
4. Decide what day and time works best for your neighborhood
5. Decide on the type of event - picnic, barbecue, potluck, etc.
6. Establish block boundaries (use natural neighborhood boundaries where possible) to include approximately 20-30 houses. Remember those on adjacent busier roads.
7. Have a child create the flyer to put in mailboxes
8. Distribute the flyer (or have a child or teen do so?) in all invited mailboxes
9. Remember, keep it simple. Think old-fashioned block parties.

If you don’t know any of your neighbors, the task force suggests making a flyer to put in 20-30 mailboxes of neighbors. You might use the flyer to encourage attendance, share some of the reasons to have a block party, get opinions on how to handle the food, and suggest possible dates and times to have the event. Include your contact information on the flyer so that your neighbors can email or call you if they would like to help. Most participating neighborhoods have had two or three residents offer to help.

Wilton Police are discouraging residents from officially closing their roads as they want to be sure that emergency vehicles are able to pass. They will only consider permits for road closures for dead ends. In those cases, signatures are required from all residents, plus various town departments in order for the permit to be granted. Instead, some neighborhoods have decided to have their block party in someone's yard, at the end of a driveway, or on the side of their road without obstructing traffic. Experienced block party planners suggest using a combination of balloons, signs that read "Caution Block Party in Progress," and orange cones to alert drivers to the party in progress.

“Current statistics report that nearly half of Americans feel lonely, with the younger generations feeling the most isolated. We know that human connection is the cornerstone of happiness. Make a difference in our community and plan your block party now to facilitate connection between children and adults in your neighborhood,” said Vanessa Elias, President of the Wilton Youth Council.

More information can be found at wiltonyouth.org/block-party On Facebook, visit “[Wilton’s Big Block Party Weekend](https://www.facebook.com/wiltonsbigblockpartyweekend/).” Organizers are asking residents to share their plans by commenting on the pinned post at the top of the page. For more information or questions, please email wiltonsbigblockpartyweekend@gmail.com or eliasvanessa5@gmail.com.

The mission of the Wilton Free Play Task Force is to inspire and educate our community about the critical importance of Free Play, and to facilitate the creation of more free play and free range opportunities for children. The Task Force is focusing on three key areas of Family/Neighborhood, School and Community. For more information on the Task Force, please contact the chairwoman, Colleen Fawcett, LCSW at Colleen.Fawcett@WiltonCT.org.

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