

Don't stop believin': Party-loving Indianapolis neighbors opt for socially distant singing

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As the sun sets on 44th Street, the people take to their porches and driveways. It is time to come out of self-isolation and see the faces of their neighbors.

“Are we going to do this thing?” one asks.

Designated Neighbor-In-Charge Jenny Forsee nods. She sets her wine glass on the ground and turns up the volume on the speaker in her kitchen.

Last Tuesday, they belted out Bon Jovi.

Woah, we're halfway there! Woah, livin' on a prayer!

A few days before that, it was Journey.

Don't stop believin'! Hold onto that feeling!

Now, the night belongs to Neil Diamond.

As the guitar and trumpets build to a joyful chorus everyone in America knows, children and adults run out into the street. They maintain six feet apart as best they can.

Hands...

“Elbows!” someone shouts, for holding hands is no longer allowed.

Touching hands, reaching out...

“No reaching out!” another yells. “Six feet!”

Touching me...

“But not touching you!” the street shouts together.

Sweet Caroline!

Bah! Bah! Bah!

Good times never seemed so good

“So good! So good! So good!” the neighborhood ad-libs as they throw their hands in the air like they can touch the sky.

The idea to have a neighborhood sing-along each night in the midst of a pandemic was executed by a team effort, as most things on 44th Street are.

Residents of one of the most social streets in Indianapolis, nestled between Washington Boulevard and Pennsylvania Street, weren't sure how to live in the time of the coronavirus. After all, they've planned block parties together every summer since 1978. Don't even get a 44th Street resident started about Halloween — the 20-house block attracts around 500 trick-or-treaters every year.

This is a place where people live on their porches, traditions thrive and neighbors are more like family.

Now, they face their biggest challenge: How can they be together, but apart?

Forsee, 53, was lying in bed one morning when inspiration struck: She would arrange for the neighbors to come together and say the Pledge of Allegiance every night at 7:30 from their porches.

Her husband, Peter, had a better idea.

“Maybe we should sing?”

With the help of her next-door neighbor, Forsee began to organize.

She alerted the rest of 44th Street on the neighborhood Facebook page. Soon, kids were choosing the songs, ones every generation on the block could sing. The list included “God Bless America,” “It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” by Fred Rogers and “Happy” by Pharrell Williams.

In Dallas, neighbors sang “Lean on Me” from their apartment windows. In Chicago, they sang “ABC” by the Jackson Five. Images of Italians singing their national anthem and banging pots and pans have inspired neighbors in cities around the world, including this one.

“We miss each other, and we can't hug or touch,” Forsee says. “To come out and see the faces of everyone on the street makes you feel safer.”

"I hope this pandemic can be contained and a vaccine is found really soon so we can get back to our glorious lives that we take for granted."

Until then, the street will sing.

On one of the first nights, they chose "Amazing Grace."

They braved the cold with winter coats, hats and pajama pants. Three young girls sat on a porch, clutching a cell phone between them so they could read the lyrics.

I once was lost, but now am found

T'was blind, but now I see

Dave Cross, 68, is the designated grandfather of everyone on the street. He cried.

"It's a funeral song," he said, eyes welling. "I'm one of the people that's going to potentially die from this."

Cross, who has lived on the street for 44 years, paused as the wind rustled his white hair. Turning toward the porches of his third generation of neighbors, he took in their faces.

"If I do die, as long as the rest of them don't, I'll be OK."