

Forty-Year Bonifest Run Ends With 'Great Memories'

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
August 10 2026 3:34 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - Bonifest, a two-day Memorial Day weekend tradition in Edwardsville for 40-plus years, has permanently shut down because of rising costs and increasingly complex insurance, security and safety requirements, event co-chair Emily Gates said.

The event was held on the St. Boniface Church grounds at North Buchanan and Fillmore streets in Edwardsville. It featured carnival rides by American Banner Amusements, pork steaks, fried fish, bands and a 5K and 3K run/walk that Gates described as one of the oldest standing running events in the Metro East.

Gates said the decision to end Bonifest was not made lightly and came after organizers reviewed the event's financial and safety obligations.

"Our cost of port-a-potties, dumpsters, tables, tents, chairs increased in a big fashion," Gates said. "Big to small, over the last couple years, everything has gone up in price."

She said the event was limited in its funding sources and in its ability to expand.

"We are landlocked, not a lot of area to grow in a busy corner of Edwardsville," Gates said.

Gates said beer, water, soda and food sales had to cover the cost of operating Bonifest, which forced organizers to consider whether the event remained financially feasible. She also cited the volunteer commitment needed to run the festival, including setup and cleanup over four days.

"Parents and families are busier now," Gates said. "We rely on parishioners to give time, talent and energy. Those spots are harder and harder to fill as time goes on."

Gates said the environment for running community events has changed since Bonifest began in 1986.

"It is a different world than in 1986," she said. "Look around; risk and liability are now at every corner."

She said organizers also had to consider security needs, including the possibility of hiring security.

"The city of Edwardsville is very different," Gates said. "Police force is very busy. They cannot walk our grounds like they used to because Edwardsville is so much bigger a community than it was back in the beginning of Bonifest."

Gates said the decision came down to financial responsibility, safety and stewardship for the community, parishioners, campus and buildings.

“We started talking about the world we live in today,” Gates said. “Is this the responsible thing to do financially and from a security and stewardship standpoint?”

She said organizers wanted to act before a serious problem occurred.

“It is better to be proactive than reactive,” Gates said. “The things we cannot control — the weather, the security and the expenses of third-party vendors — can plan night and day. The last two days of the event were in God’s hands at that point each year.”

Gates said Bonifest had been fortunate over its run.

“We have been so fortunate and would like to end the event with everyone having favorable memories and the stellar reputation we have had,” she said.

Gates said the event’s bands and other components will be missed.





“The bands were fantastic,” she said. “There were so many great components of Bonifest.”

She said family dynamics and the growth of Edwardsville also affected grassroots events.

“My mom and dad were involved in Edwardsville back in the beginning of the event,” Gates said. “Parents had their children volunteer in that time. We don't see that as much now; it is not the same mentality of families.”

Gates said she and co-chair Ryan Hentz both grew up with Bonifest. She said their parents were on the committee that started the event in 1986. Hentz has chaired the event for 20 years, and Gates joined him before COVID-19, about six or seven years ago. She said she and her husband had chaired stands for Bonifest at least for 10 years, and she had served as co-chair for about the last six years.

Over the years, the Bonifest proceeds help benefit both St. Boniface Church and its school as a primary fundraiser.

Gates said the response to the decision to stop the event showed the place Bonifest held in the hearts of those in the community.

“Most parishes end events and don’t think twice about stopping events,” she said. “Bonifest meant a lot to a lot of people. It speaks volumes to our community and leadership taking Boniface over the past 40 years.”