

July 29, 2011

University City Celebrates Chuck Berry Statue and Centennial Greenway

Delmar Boulevard was the place to be on the morning of July 29.

By [Catherine Krummey](#)

On Friday morning, the Delmar Loop in University City became a hot spot for people from across the St. Louis area.

Before the dedication of the [Chuck Berry Statue](#), the Centennial Greenway ribbon cutting ceremony was held.

Around 9:45 a.m., the Great Rivers Greenway organization officially opened the Centennial Greenway.

"It was high-time to open the trail," said Nancy Thompson, the community outreach manager for GRG.

The bike path, which has its main hub next to [Fitz's](#), is part of a larger plan to have a trail all the way from downtown St. Louis to St. Charles, according to Todd Antoine, deputy director for planning for GRG.

This first one-mile segment goes from the Loop to Forest Park, with the ultimate goal of the project to connect to the [Katy Trail](#).

Once the ribbon-cutting ceremony was over, the festivities turned to celebrating Berry. Throughout the morning, the band Blues Plus played some of Berry's hits, including "No Particular Place to Go."

Around 10:10 a.m., [Chuck Berry](#) arrived at 6555 Delmar Blvd. for the dedication of his eight-foot, 1,200-pound bronze statue.

Berry was preceded by the [Show Me Sound Drumline](#), which marched their way in front of the crowd to announce his arrival.

Legendary performer [Ron Isley](#), KMOX's Charlie Brennan, St. Louis Walk of Fame Founder Joe Edwards, University City Mayor Pro Tem Arthur Sharpe Jr. and Harry Weber, the sculptor of Berry's statue, were all on hand to say a few words.

"I hope I've done this guy some justice," Weber said. "Chuck is part of a history that goes beyond music... Thanks, Chuck, for providing the soundtrack to my youth."

"Thank you very much for your support in having us put up this statue in beautiful University City," Brennan said to the crowd.

Brennan served as the emcee for the dedication, and played voice recordings of legendary musicians, including Little Richard and Elvis Costello, giving their regards to Berry, the "father of rock and roll."

"Congrats to everyone for getting the statue put up where it belongs," Costello said in his recording.

"I wanted to give a shout out to national treasure and true guitar hero Chuck Berry," Joe Perry (of Aerosmith) said in his recording. "You are one in a million."

"I've been a fan all my life," Merle Haggard said in his recording.

"I've always loved him... the greatest musician in the world, Mr. Chuck Berry," Little Richard said in his recording.

It was Edwards, however, who had the honor of introducing Berry to the podium.

"He went from [Sumner High School](#) to the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#)," Edwards said. "I'm proud to introduce a great St. Louisan, the incomparable Chuck Berry."

Berry kept his remarks short.

"I'm not going to keep you out here very long," Berry said. "I'm not a very good speaker."

The crowd cheered for Berry as a group of performers from the [Center of Creative Arts](#) gathered to close the dedication.

Hundreds of people gathered on Delmar Boulevard, which was closed from 9-11 a.m.

Ophelia Williams and her son, Ralph Williams, were two of the Berry fans in attendance. Ophelia wore a Chuck Berry T-shirt and posed for a couple of pictures with the statue.

"She's 90, so she goes back to when he played at the Cosmo Club in East St. Louis," Ralph said of his mother.

Also in attendance were members of Berry's family (including his wife, Themetta Suggs) and representatives of various media outlets. Brennan did a live broadcast on [KMOX](#) from the statue site.

During his broadcast, Brennan interviewed musicians [Billy Peek](#) and [Bob Kuban](#), who are both also St. Louis natives.

"Everybody who came up in rock and roll came up on the back of Chuck Berry," Peek said.

To continue the day's festivities, Berry will throw out the ceremonial first pitch at tonight's [St. Louis Cardinals game](#), which is scheduled to start at 7:15 p.m.

Berry's next monthly performance at [Blueberry Hill](#) will be on Aug. 17; however, the show is sold out. Tickets for his Sept. 14 show go on sale Aug. 19.

More information about the statue can be found on its [website](#); more information on the Centennial Greenway can be found on the Great Rivers Greenway [website](#).