

Foster's Daily Democrat

EVENTS

Free Comic Book Day returns to Rochester with cosplay, prizes and fun

Karen Dandurant Foster's Daily Democrat

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Key Points

Free Comic Book Day is an annual event in Rochester hosted by Jetpack Comics.

Attendees can visit participating local businesses to collect over two dozen free comics.

The day includes a costume contest, a party, and opportunities to meet comic book artists and writers.

A special "Turtle Den" event will feature artists involved with the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles franchise.

ROCHESTER — The day comic book lovers wait all year is almost here; [Free Comic Book Day](#) is this Saturday, May 2.

Thousands of comic aficionados will converge on Rochester, most in costume, cosplaying their favorite characters. There is a costume contest at the end of the day, and a party at the Garage, the bar behind the [Governor's Inn](#), 78 Wakefield St., featuring the band Curmudjun to end the day.

[Free Comic Book Day](#) is a worldwide phenomenon, and this Saturday will be the 19th year the event has been hosted by [Jetpack Comics](#), located at 37 North Main Street. Owner Ralph DiBernardo said he and his staff love the day as much as the people who attend.

"When I first opened Jetpack comics, I was on a side street, and no one knew where we were," DiBernardo said. "I wanted my customers to find us and all our downtown businesses, and hopefully they'd come back to shop here."

DiBernardo has been on North Main Street for 18 years, and in business, 20 years.

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Free Comic Book Day begins at 10 a.m., and the free comics giveaway runs until 4 p.m., with the costume contest taking place at 4:30 p.m. at the Garage, followed by the party at 7 p.m.

How Free Comic Day works

All city businesses and even city services, such as the Fire Department, are invited to participate. A map of those businesses participating can be found on Jetpack Comics website (www.jetpackcomics.com) or picked up at the store.

Participating city businesses are Holy Rosary Credit Union, Busy Bee Cafe, Cinco's Cantina, Collec-tiques, First Seacoast Bank, First United Methodist Church, Holidays on the Hill, Masonic Temple/Humane Lodge, Jetpack Comics, Past Along, Past Points Vintage & Antiques, Progressive Esthetics, Revolution Taproom & Grill, Rochester Fire Department, Rochester Main Street, Rochester Opera House, Rochester Performing Arts Center, Skele-Tone, Stage Door, Studley's Flower Gardens, The Garage, The Governor's Inn, Tinysardines (At Jetpack Comics), Tri-City Bikes, Union Street Antiques, and Woodman Museum (Dover).

DiBernardo said Jetpack Comics buys the comics and participating businesses buy a share of them, at cost.

"It's a huge loss to us each year," joked DiBernardo. "But it's such a beloved event, and so much fun, we are happy to do it. Plus, it has become our biggest yearly advertisement."

DiBernardo said between 3,000 and 4,000 people generally come through the city on Free Comic Book Day. If they visit all the locations, he said they can leave with over two dozen free comics.

"For the businesses, these people visit the shops and, of course, the restaurants," he said. "Many business owners provide bounce-back coupons, which bring people back into the city, so it's good for everyone. You can start anywhere like a scavenger hunt. A lot of people start at [Studley's Flower Gardens](#) and make a big loop through the city to hit all the locations."

Extra events

There will be two events at the Governor's Inn: the costume contest and the party. DiBernardo said they actually have two different spots this year.

"At the Rochester Opera House, and on the front lawn of city hall, a lot of vendors will set up booths," said DiBernardo. "On the main opera house floor, there will be more vendors, and comic book writers and artists. One will be our own Rochester resident, Jeremy Robinson. He is a local author who began with horror and monsters and has now turned to comics books as well. 'Nectar,' his first comic, sold so incredibly well, we were blown away. The first issue now sells upwards of \$25 a copy. He will be a premier guest at the opera house."

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

In addition to the events at the Garage, in the ballroom at Governor's Inn will be a "turtle" event, as DiBernardo referred to it. Called the Turtle Den, it will feature several artists involved in the work of creating TMNT content, including Ben Bishop, Steve Lavigne, Eric Talbot, Jim Lawson, A.C. Farley, Dad's Marketplace and Services, Matt Smith, Tom Waltz, Steven King, Luis Antonio Delgado, RZP, Mateus Santolouco, Cory Smith, Chris Vance, Fero Pe, and Vero Stewart.

"The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle world began in Dover," DiBernardo said. The creators, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, have been friends of mine forever. Over the years, I became friends with the people they hire. TMNT is now one of the top ten intellectual properties in the world. It's a multimillion-dollar property, now owned by Paramount. The two guys need a huge staff now to handle sales of merchandise, including toys, books, movies, and games. They will not be there, but

many of the associates will be. Crazy to think this began with guys sitting in a room drawing turtles, to a multimillion-dollar company, now hiring artists and writers."

Artist Alley, which will be at the Rochester Opera House, is a showcase of comics artists, including Jeremy Robinson, Paul Pelletier, Jeff Kline, and Jeff Lundberg.

The event is rain or shine. DiBernardo said tents will be used in the case of rain at the two event locations.