



NEWS RELEASE

First Fridays Florence Introduces Enhancements at April 2nd Event

You might not have noticed, but downtown's First Fridays Florence event is looking a little different these days. It has a new logo that was introduced last fall, but that only scratches the surface. The monthly arts and music festival that runs from March through December was first introduced in August of 2005, and has seen steady growth over the last four years. So what makes the event different in 2010? Just about everything.

Walking down Court Street on April 2nd, you'll see banners that indicate the new information center. First Fridays committee members will display official event credentials. And new web-based communications will be on display for exhibitors and attendees to preview. The feel is definitely more formal and integrated, and that was a purposeful move.

Van Morgan, president of Downtown Florence Unlimited (DFU), the coalition that organizes the event, explained, "As fast as the festival has grown over the past few years, we've had to take progressive action to ensure the event was organized in a way that was sustainable for our volunteer staff – while still beneficial to our exhibitors and attendees." According to Morgan, occasional organizational refocusing for events such as this is common, especially if an event is successful. "As an event like this grows, additional requirements are placed on the organizers to meet the needs of everyone involved. And if these needs are not met, artisans become reluctant to participate and visitor attendance dwindles. It's all very synergistic." Booth assignments, advance registration and other

organizational “tweaks” have been met with overwhelming acceptance from exhibitors, according to Morgan.

With a hefty 10-festival event schedule over the course of a year, the festival has also taken on a decidedly more promotional role. “We’re spending a great deal more time as a group focusing on forms of promotion and communication that directly benefit our artists and musicians. We’re also seeking creative new ways to reach the public – not just in the immediate area, but across the region with the purpose of driving more tourists to the event,” Morgan added.

Teryl Shields, chairman of the First Fridays Committee, is glad to see the fruits of the committee’s recent labor. “We’re very excited by the progress we’ve made over the last few months. I believe that we’ve created an environment that is beneficial to exhibitors and very entertaining for visitors,” Shields said. “I’m especially excited about our new website and Facebook page. These tools will give us a proactive way to promote our artisans and performers while providing real-time reports on upcoming points of interest for our virtual fans.”

Shields also indicated that these cumulative advancements have not been lost on downtown businesses. “Watch for more and more downtown stores to create their own events to coincide with First Fridays,” she said.

Heading the new communications effort has been marketing consultant Clyde Beaver, a recent transplant from Atlanta, and native of Florence. “I’ve worked with several volunteer-based organizations in the past, so I was very familiar with this type of growth process. With the unending resolve of the committee, we’ve made substantial progress over a very short period of time.”

Beaver, who designed the new website and promotional materials, went on to praise the collaboration he has received from committee members, local design firms and Florence/Lauderdale Tourism. “These individuals are the reason First Fridays has

advanced as much as it has in recent history. With sustained effort, this event will grow into what I think will be one of North Alabama's most recognized attractions.”

So far, the new efforts seem to be working. Nearly 40 exhibitors have already reserved spaces, one of the event's strongest early spring showings. Three bands are scheduled to perform (Ray Brothers, Christian Turner and Hey Man!). The new website, scheduled for release at the event has drawn a great deal of buzz, and the First Fridays Facebook fan page now includes over 1,100 followers.

Hours for the April 2nd event are 5-8:00 pm and admission is free to the public. For more information on First Fridays Florence, call 1-877-290-8880 or contact the Florence/Lauderdale Tourism Office at (256) 740-4141.

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