

Gallery Night Will Continue

Over the last couple of months, one of the most common and frequent questions I have been asked is will the twenty year old special event known as Gallery Night continue. To those not familiar with this five times a year local celebration of the arts, Gallery Night may seem a little ho hum. But then again such a response would need to be coming from a relative newcomer to our community. Gallery Night has one of the most known and favorable brands for a special event in town. It is a perennial favorite for those that enjoy viewing and listening to new artists as well as local favorites. A significant percentage of the ten to twelve thousand people that regularly attend one of these evenings of art and entertainment in Downtown Pensacola come back again and again.

The event is free of charge to the attendees and showcases the work and talents of between thirty and fifty local artists in just as many venues. The exact number of venues each Gallery Night is determined by the availability of the local artists and the participation of the local businesses during the month when the event is scheduled. While all of the downtown art galleries and most of the museums and large performance venues participate, so too do dozens of local businesses that stay open late, invite in a local artist to show and demonstrate his or her work, and provide light refreshments for the art patrons as they walk between participating locations enjoying the evening.

This much anticipated downtown spotlight on local artists began twenty years ago as a partnership between the Arts Council of Northwest Florida, the Downtown Arts District Association, and the Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board. While all three groups were intimately involved in planning, organizing, and presenting the event during its first decade, DADA has seen much of its capacity for such programming diminish while the DIB started to focus more and more of its efforts on growing residential living and greater retail vitality in the downtown. As a result, the presentation of Gallery Night became the primary and high profile responsibility of the Arts Council. With the unfortunate demise of that organization during December, the continuation of Gallery Nights – as well as all other programming previously done by that organization – has come into serious question.

As a result, several conversations about the status and future of the event have been occurring at various committees of the DIB as well as at the board level. Additionally, discussions about how to preserve and continue Gallery Night have been occurring among representatives of a group of business owners that have been long-term Gallery Night participants, the DIB, the new ACE group, and the City of Pensacola. While all the details of which entity does what, when, and for how long to keep the event alive have not been fully decided as of the end of January, there is a common commitment to continuing the premier event that is Gallery Night without any interruptions. Details on which entity or entities will do what are still evolving. The outcome however is agreed. Gallery Night will continue to happen as it has in the past. For 2010, there will be a Gallery Night downtown from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the third Friday evening of March, May, September, and November as well as the second Friday in July (i.e. the same weekend of the Blue Angel Show).

Get ready; it's just a few weeks until March 19th and the return of this downtown-centric signature event.

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