

The Growing Pains Of Success

When the Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board reassumed the responsibility for planning, presenting, and promoting the Gallery Night events almost two years ago, it did so with the firm resolve that the event would only spend what it could raise from sponsors and participating galleries and businesses. That “don’t live beyond your means” approach to keeping the event solvent has worked with regards to the planning and promotion of the actual arts event. What was not envisioned was the rapid growth that has occurred in art venues, attendees, visibility, and buzz for the event. All have expanded significantly since the DIB resumed responsibility for the events and instituted some fundamental structural changes to bring the focus back to the arts – and in particular the local arts community.

The growth of the seven Gallery Night events moved from rapid to explosive with what was originally a trial closing of Palafox Place during Gallery Night in May of 2010. After twenty years of keeping the streets open, that long sought action was more than successful and, as a result, fundamentally changed the feel and scope of the event. Every Gallery Night event since has seen Palafox Place closed as well as two blocks of E. Government Street and one extra block of S. Palafox Street. The ten to twelve thousand attendees each event have loved being able to spill out into the streets and convert those traditional traffic lanes into a wide sidewalk for four hours on the evenings when Gallery Night is held. What started out as an experiment (closing the streets for Gallery Nights) has become a roaring success with literally thousands of people strolling through the streets of downtown.

While the DIB and the participating downtown galleries and businesses have continued to be able to plan, present, and promote the Gallery Night events, the costs associated with closing the streets (i.e. off-duty police officers, portable bathrooms, additional clean-up after the event, insurance, temporary signage, traffic barricades, city permits, etc.) collectively bring just under twenty-five hundred dollars of additional costs to the event each and every time that the streets are closed. These cost are on top of the approximately two thousand dollars that just planning, presenting, and promoting each event costs.

Gallery Nights have been fortunate to have had sponsors for the street closures every time since May of 2011. The independent locally-owned galleries and businesses that host local artists and their works have found it difficult to keep reaching deeper into their pockets to pay for the added costs of closing the streets alone. Paying for the growing cost of closing the streets is becoming more and more difficult as Gallery Night is a free event with a mission to highlight and celebrate the local and regional arts community. Gallery Night as an event produces no revenue. Luckily, with the growth of the Gallery Night events (and the attendance) since the DIB got back into the driver’s seat, it is a much more sellable enterprise for entities looking to market their brand, products, or services in a concentrated area to thousands of people. Street closing sponsors are still needed for some of the Gallery Night events this fall as well as most of the dates in 2012.

Entities interested in helping to keep closing the streets during Gallery Night events are encouraged to contact the DIB to discuss sponsorship opportunities. In the mean time, enjoy one of Pensacola's best events again on Friday, July 15th for the July 2011 Gallery Night.

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Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board