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Exposure

Artists use local events for notoriety

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Planet Ink members (from left) James Sherrill, Michael Bowling and Alexander Bowling) perform on Mobile Plaza in Florence during a First Friday event in 2007.

Family fun usually is the theme for the summertime. And with this in mind, many area musicians have chosen themed events to showcase their talents and bring acclaim to their bands.

David Messer, vice president of Downtown Florence Unlimited, said First Fridays is one such event. It helps create a family environment, while allowing new artists to display their talents. He said during First

Fridays, restaurants serve as a hot spot for musicians.

"We have some merchants to have musicians inside," Messer said.

This Friday, events will run 5-8 p.m. along Court Street.

He said the artists benefit when people come to shop and eat and they hear the musicians playing. That, he said, helps to get the artists' names in the community.

"It's also bringing in guests and visitors to Florence," Messer said.

Four years ago, the city of Florence conceived the idea of an evening festival that merged art and live music to be held the first Friday of each month. Now the event has become a signature Florence festival, attracting fans from throughout the Shoals and surrounding areas.

First Fridays is sponsored by Florence Main Street, Downtown Florence Unlimited and the Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts.

Spring Park Market

In Tuscumbia, Spring Park Market is more than just fruits and veggies, according to Sherry Campbell.

The market is held Thursdays between the first of June and the last of September each year. While attendees shop for homegrown produce and locally made products, local performers provide a little background music beginning at 4 p.m. A cooking demonstration ends the market at 6 p.m.

Today, the Rogers High School Bluegrass Band will perform.

Campbell, director of the Shoals Culinary Center in Florence, said the market was started five years ago to benefit the center's patrons. In addition, the market creates a family-friendly environment for local musicians to showcase their talents.

"We wanted to have a venue for our clients at the center to sale other products," she said. "We didn't want to just have an upscale market."

Past performers include Shoals Dulcimer, Just Country, the Old Timers Lifeline, Dillon Hodges and fiddlers Mark Campbell and Kayleen McCafferty.

Eli Harper, of the contemporary Christian group Lifeline, said playing at local events helps to boost the bands popularity.

"We have people calling us on a steady basis," Harper said. "We don't just necessarily come to entertain but to spread the gospel."

According to Harper, the group members had been acquainted since 1999, performing together but in different groups.

Just last year, the six members decided to officially become a band, singing only a capella and affiliated with the Church of Christ denomination.

"The people that we have performed for have been really responsive," Harper said.

They performed three times during the W.C. Handy Festival. He said now the group hopes to take its talents beyond the Shoals.

"Our goal is to one day to go out nationally," Harper said.

Not only is the music an added benefit of the market, Campbell said, but the musicians play for free and are willing to participate in the market.

"They do this out of the goodness of their heart," she said.

First Saturdays

For Rogersville, First Saturdays is new, but something Gayle Littrell said she hopes becomes a tradition.

Littrell, chairwoman of tourism for the chamber of commerce, said the event was created last year for residents to be able to

socialize.

This First Saturday runs 5-8 p.m. downtown through Lee Street with performances from Second Chance and Ray McCafferty at Heritage Park.

"It's small town fellowship, you might call it," Littrell said.

Saturday's events will include craft exhibits, and area stores and shops will stay open longer.

In addition, the fire department will sponsor a fish fry with proceeds going to the department.

The event goes from April to September.

Littrell said she has noticed that the music helps bring citizens together while allowing the musicians to get their names in the public.

Dennis Odem, leader of The Cadillacs and the Country Legends Band, has performed at both Rogersville's First Saturdays and the Spring Park Market. He said events like these help build the bands' reputation.

"We play on a regular basis," Odem said.

Odem said the Cadillacs perform '50s music while the Country Legends perform Hank Williams' songs and other country classics. Odem has been playing in the Shoals for almost

20 years and says he hopes his local career can grow.

"The experience has been fantastic," he said. "I plan to travel a lot further."

Littrell said sometimes when artists perform, they get invitations to play at other events. This she said, further gives them

notoriety.

"Rogersville is a music-loving town," she said. "We have a good crowd anytime we have music.

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