

New events at Courthouse Plaza to offer free Downtown Fun

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Courthouse Plaza will be hoppin' after hours this summer with a series of new Downtown Fun events intended to please locals and tourists of all ages, and it's all free to attend.

New this year is a series of family fun nights and musical jam events at which locals can show

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off their talents with the support of hired musicians.

Plans call for Family Fun nights from 6 to 8 pm June 8 and 22 and July 6, 20 and 27. Each event will feature a different community or youth group, for example a youth sports night. The various events will include hands-on activities like kids art opportunities, a mechanical bull, climbing wall and obstacle course from Wowies.

The events will also offer a showcase for other city departments. The Fire Department plans to do demonstrations that may include a fire engine or the Fire Safety House, which simulates a kitchen fire so firefighters can show people what to do in a fire. The house is normally used for school demonstrations. Representatives from the Police Department and library may also participate, but details are still in the works.

For boot scooters and electric sliders, June 2, 16 and 28 will host Scootin' Under the Stars with a line dance instructor and country music.

"My goal is to get a country dance instructor for the first half hour to 45 minutes to do line dance instruction," Jude Candelaria, artist, co-owner of Zia Sound, and the vendor managing the Downtown Fun events, said. "It's fun and it's nice to learn something. If you go to a country club and see a line dance, it would be nice to know that dance."

Live music theme nights will have featured performers, but also invite local musicians to play with the pros. Playlists will be advertised ahead of the events so locals can show up ready to join in, Candelaria said. Core bands will play whether any amateurs join in or not.

"Music is healing. Music is a great thing to make people happy and to break the monotony of the last couple of years. It is a great way to bring people together," he said. "I really want to show the community how if you do want a career in music, even at a young age it is possible if you do it the right way and follow the right steps."

The jams will start with jazz, but rock and pop nights will follow. They will also offer a free career education component, teaching volunteers how to set up and take down sound equipment.

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“I think it’s exciting that he wants to integrate an educational component to an event that is free and open to the community in the heart of downtown,” Jennifer Lazarz, marketing and tourism manager for the City of Gallup, said.

“We will be doing a youth audio camp. The youth can come and we will be teaching them the basics of audio, plugs, wrapping cords,” Candelaria said, noting there’s a shortage of professional sound engineers, so career opportunities abound. “By the end when we have our last youth performance, those kids will be able to pretty much run the show.”

The scheduled core groups are: Jazz Jams/Standards Under the Stars June 3; Youth Performers of the Northwest June 17; Latin Music Live June 30 and July 15; World Music and Drum Circle July 14; and Hot Headliners July 1 and 29.

Leavitt Amp Concert Series

The plaza will again host the Leavitt Amp Concert Series, presenting a variety of music artists, at 6 pm Saturday nights through July 30.

For the grownups, the Gallup Mainstreet Arts and Cultural District will host a beer garden at seven of the shows in the series. Only adults will be allowed into the beer garden area and a security guard will check IDs.

Next up is country duo Side Pony June 4. Native rapper Def-I takes the stage June 18; folk singer Raye Zaragoza appears June 25; Zydeco artist Curley Taylor July 2; edgy alternative girl band Lindy Vision July 9; rock band Mozart Gabriel & Fox Royale July 16; jazz rappers Ddat July 23; and closing with R&B act The Taylor Scott Band July 30. Many of the acts are from New Mexico.

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Events will be publicized locally and with out-of-town tourism materials, Lazarz said, including providing information to local hotels to share with guests.

Separately, Camille's Café hosts a free Friday Night Rides car show & shine at the plaza the first Friday of every month during the summer.

One thing that will be missing from the plaza this year is the formerly Nightly Indian Dances. The longtime draw was scheduled to move to the Gallup Cultural Center but that contract has yet to be approved, Lazarz said. Pending approval, plans call for the dances at the Gallup Cultural Center at 7 pm Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during July. The move miffed some local business owners.

"It was disappointing to see that the organizations that managed the nightly dance program were so quick to abandon the Courthouse Plaza, but it was nice to see them recognize their mistake," James Rich, a restaurant owner who wasn't happy with the decision for this year, said.

The City Council wants the dances moved back to the Plaza next year and instructed Lazarz to put out an RFP in the fall for an event vendor.

"I embrace the culture of our area, which is Native dancing and Native music," Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak said. "The fact that we lost that and are losing that has broken my heart [...] I'm a musician and I know there's a lot of musical people here. A lot of people come from out of town to see Native dancing. They love that."

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