



Group works to help GrassRoots grow Second annual music event needs volunteers to assist in all areas

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PITTSBORO -- Ten or so people mill around a house on an open farm site in rural Silk Hope. Their overriding mood is one of tranquility despite the grandiose mission on their doorstep.

They are planning the second annual Shakori Hills GrassRoots Festival of Music & Dance, a four-day event with 35-plus bands and an expected attendance of at least 5,000 people.

To take place right on the farm, the event is designed to bring together all kinds of music and people for a feel-good festival, organizer Jordan Puryear said.

"It's really a celebration of the good things in life," said Puryear, who helped bring the not-for-profit festival here from Trumansburg, N.Y. Now in its 14th successful year in New York, the festival has been carbon-copied for folks in the South.

Pittsboro resident and artist Ducka Kelly said she attended the GrassRoots Festival in Trumansburg when she lived in nearby Ithaca, N.Y., and was pleasantly surprised when it was announced last year in this area.

"For me it was sort of a miracle that it followed me down to Pittsboro," she said.

Kelly said the two locations display a similar cultural climate and appreciation for music.

"The Ithaca and Trumansburg area is a very artistic and spiritual area, and so is this area," she said. "You can just feel when you come to this area that there's some sort of spiritual feeling going on here. There's a strength and an energy going on here, and it's positive energy. It feels very good."

That good feeling is exactly why Puryear chose Chatham County. He said "community" is the key word to describe the residents in the area.

"What makes [the festival] really possible, and just special, is the community," he said. "It seems to be a bunch of great people."

The people themselves came out in vast numbers for the festival's emergence in Chatham last year. Despite poor weather, the festival attracted 5,000 attendees of all ages and ethnicities, said Katie Wadsworth, publicist for the event.

"The whole goal of the festival is to bring many different types of culture and music to one area ... to enjoy each other's music and create a common ground," she said.

The performers, from world musicians to country singers, reflect that goal. "I mean, we have the No. 1 one performer in Africa, and then we have Patty Loveless," Wadsworth said.

Although the event is not for profit, the bands don't perform for free. The money from ticket sales -- a four-day pass costs \$65 and there are fixed rates for each single day -- goes to paying the bands, reinforcing the grounds and running other festival operations, Wadsworth said.

In future years, if the event grows and begins to churn a profit, organizers hope to donate to local charities like Chatham County Arts.

Tickets will increase in price after April 10, and are available at a number of outlets in the Triangle area. For the list, or for more festival information, call 542-8142 or visit www.grassrootsfest.org/Shakori/.

In its effort to support the arts, the festival will host artists and their craft stands. Vendors from as far as Michigan and New York will join locals in selling everything from dyed clothing to handmade drums.

And artists aren't the only ones who can have a stake in the festival's action. Puryear stressed that any volunteer's abilities can be put to use.

"The festival really provides a vehicle for every type of skill," he said, explaining how a mason and a local electrician had offered installation services, and a woman who used to be a manager and chef at the General Store Café now volunteers her skills.

"A festival is tons and tons of little things more than any one big thing," he said. "It's like a catalyst, a gathering point, for the community to really express itself."

Raleigh resident Doug Corkhill said he goes to Shakori Hills just for the "attitude."

"I don't even care who the bands are," he said. "It's fun to be there. When you step into a festival site and you stay there for three days, it becomes a microcosm of humanity."

While some choose not to camp out on festival grounds, organizers do provide an area for camping and encourage people to use it. Corkhill said he and his friend set up their tent close enough to hear the music on one of the festival's four stages.

"We tent and hang out and meet people, and everyone who is there is brothers and sisters," he said. "It's a real happy, friendly atmosphere at these things. It's not like going to see Guns 'N Roses. It's like we are all one family."

And the children are included in this family event. A kids activity area, conveniently located right by the food stations, will provide projects, games and demonstrations for children from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

Wadsworth said attendees appreciate that the festival is "not solely for kids or solely for adults." A lot of young couples and families are attracted to the event for its children's program.

The activities and demonstrations aren't just for youngsters, either. Adults can flock to a poetry slam or fiddle contest, or they can participate in a variety of scheduled, on-site workshops like West Indian dance instruction and body movement relaxation training.

Festival-goers also will be able to watch clogging, hear bedtime stories and connect with other attendees in a Sunday morning gathering called "Welcome to the circle, sisters and brothers."

According to the festival's Web site, the "usual rules" apply for the event, meaning "no pets, no drugs, no public display of alcohol, no bad vibes."

The private group First Health will provide medical aid at the festival, but organizers are calling for volunteers to run the rest of the show.

Volunteer coordinator Lissa Farrell said at least 200 people are needed for whole event, and while the Saturday "work parties" each week have been successful, they need more help.

"We probably don't even have half of what we need," she said. "We have people signing up every day, but still need more. Volunteers are really what makes the festival happen."

Corkhill -- who attends many festivals and calls himself a "festivarian" -- said that he likes to volunteer at events.

"Volunteering is best of all the worlds because you get in for free, you feel like you've put something back into the festival, and when you're done your shift, you still have time to party and enjoy the scenes," he said.

Puryear said he puts a lot of confidence in the community to really "own" the event and practice cooperation. And in his effort to bring people together for good, he generally avoids conflicts such as those in local politics.

"Political arguments certainly have a place, but issues often just get argued over," Puryear said. "As man tries to strive to be happy, and find, you know, a place in the world, I think a lot of people think they need to be rich or get money. But they should see the more beautiful things in life and celebrate with fellow man."

With that in mind, the event is strictly not for profit. "It's intended to be outside of the idea of commercialism, away from the mentality that you always have to get something for your efforts," Puryear said

Even with the festival just three weeks away, the coordinators don't seem stressed.

"Everything's coming together really well," Puryear said. "Knock on wood, ya know?"