

> **GREENVILLE** NOW HAS THE REPUTATION OF A PLACE THAT **VALUES THE ARTS** AND VALUES **ARTISTS AS PEOPLE**, TOO.

Artisphere kicked off in downtown Greenville on Friday, with works by artists from across the United States filling the 120 booths along Main Street. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

ART INVITES A CLOSER LOOK

Artisphere opens strong under clear skies

By Paul Hyde
Arts Writer
phyde@greenvilleonline.com

Thousands converged Friday on downtown Greenville for the first day of Artisphere, South Carolina's big celebration of the visual arts.

"The quality of the art is great," said Greg Durham, who was visiting Greenville with his wife, Jackie, from Southport.

Balmy weather made for an especially strong opening day, with individuals, couples and families browsing for art while others enjoyed food, live music or activities for children.

"We always love Greenville," said Ed Tremoulis, as he and his wife, Deb, walked their Shih-poo Rocky down Main Street.

The couple, from Lima, Ohio, were visiting Greenville to attend their son's graduation at Clemson University and decided to check out Artisphere.

"I love the art, good prices, too," said Deb Tremoulis, adding that the couple also enjoyed Artisphere's

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Strong sales in the past have helped Artisphere earn a top ranking among visual arts festivals. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

ARTISTS IN ACTION

See video of demonstrating artists during Artisphere's opening day **at** GreenvilleOnline.com.

FESTIVAL

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wine-tasting, a new event added last year.

At the center of the ninth annual outdoor festival are the 120 booths lining Main Street and featuring the work of artists from around the nation. Thirteen of those artists are from the Upstate.

Greenville Mayor Knox White was strolling down Main Street on Friday afternoon on his way to meet Artisphere founder Henry Horowitz for an annual meet-and-greet.

"We go around and shake every artist's hand and welcome each one to Greenville," White said.

White said he and Horowitz visited several festivals around the country to research "best practices" long before inaugurating the first Artisphere in 2005.

"One thing that we learned was that the care and feeding of the artists was very important," White said.

"We get high marks for hospitality and artists go out and spread the word about what a great festival we have in Artisphere. Greenville now has the reputation of a place that values the arts and values artists as people, too."

Merchants praised the festival for providing a considerable economic boost to downtown Greenville.



Despite a sprinkling of rain, the skies mostly stayed clear on Artisphere's opening day, bringing throngs of visitors to the streets of downtown. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

Restaurateur Rick Erwin, who took a moment to sample the art Friday afternoon, said his downtown restaurants were fully staffed and expecting a big surge in business over the weekend.

"Artisphere is the finest arts festival in the state of South Carolina," said Erwin, who will become chairman for the event's 10th anniversary next year. "This is something I'm very proud to be involved in."

Noting that rain was threatening Saturday's festivities, however, Erwin said, "We're hoping for some help from Mother Nature Saturday."

As evening descended Friday, a few scattered showers didn't deter festival-goers.

"I think this is one of Greenville's premier events," said Charles Ratterree, board chairman of the Metropolitan Arts Council. "It's wonderful that we all live in a town where the arts can be part of a premier event."

Artisphere continues today from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The event opened four hours earlier than usual and on a high note, having won resounding accolades as one of the nation's highest-grossing events for artists.

The 120 artists in last year's festival reported an average of $5,865 in sales, which helped thrust Artisphere to the No. 7 spot on a respected national ranking of visual arts festivals, Greg Lawler's annual Art Fair Sourcebook.

Genna Grushovenko, a Greenville artist who creates paintings with his wife, Signe, said art patrons tend to browse on Friday, often waiting to purchase art on Saturday or Sunday.

"We have mostly high-priced items so people may take more than one day to make up their minds," said Grushovenko, as he chatted with prospective customers at his booth.

Near Falls Park, meanwhile, an enthusiastic group of children surrounded ceramic artist Teresa Pietsch from Burnsville, N.C., as she demonstrated how to make a vase.

"I can show you what my hands are doing, but putting it into words is difficult," Pietsch told the children, as a mound of clay slowly began to take artistic shape on her potter's wheel.

Street musician Jeff Neil played jazz, country and classical music on his electric violin on Graham Plaza in front of the Peace Center for a crowd of onlookers.

"It's been pretty good," said Neil, pointing to the tips in his violin case.

All events are listed on the Artisphere website (www.artisphere.us) and full-color brochures are available at the event as well. For more information, call 864-271-9398.

■ For the latest in local arts news and reviews, follow Paul Hyde on Facebook or Twitter: @PaulHyde7. Paul also blogs under "Entertainment" at greenvilleonline.com.