

Straight and narrow



Brick mason John Williams performs work on a sign base on Washington Street in Greenville. PATRICK COLLARD/STAFF

Artisphere applications most in festival's 8 years

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As an indicator of its growing prestige, Artisphere this year received the most artist applications ever in its eight-year history.

A total 884 artists — 100 more than last year — vied for 120 booths available at downtown Greenville's big annual celebration of the visual arts, scheduled for May 11-13.

"I think it reflects a growing awareness of Artisphere," said Kerry Murphy, executive director of the outdoor festival, which also features food, live music and activities for children. "Word of mouth is definitely traveling around the art show circuit."

For artists nationwide, two things are driving interest in Artisphere: the potential for strong sales and Greenville's hospitality, Murphy said.

"The word is out that Greenville is a community that appreciates art and culture," Murphy said. "We're fortunate that

we've got a great setting for the festival."

The increasing number of applicants allows Artisphere to select a range of first-rate artists who work in a variety of media — from painting to woodwork, ceramics, sculpture, photography, glass and jewelry.

Following a detailed selection process by a panel of expert jurors, 120 artists from around the country were chosen to participate on GE Artists Row.

About 40 of those artists are new to the festival.

"I was thrilled to find out I was accepted," said Jacki Newell, one of the first-time participants as well as one of the 12 local artists to be featured at Artisphere.

"I've been in some small art shows but it's exciting to be able to be in a large show like Artisphere," said Newell, who will exhibit her paintings of downtown Greenville.

New this year to Artisphere is a program that provides an up-and-coming local artist with free booth space and professional de-

velopment assistance. Painter Julie Shabkie is the recipient of this Emerging Artist Scholarship.

"Artisphere's Emerging Artist program is an outstanding addition to the festival," said Alan Ethridge, executive director of the Metropolitan Arts Council, which helped to fund the program. "It will be instrumental in nurturing and encouraging a local artist."

David Lominack, market president for TD Bank, said Artisphere contributes substantially to Greenville's economy. TD Bank is Artisphere's presenting sponsor.

"We're just amazed about how successful this festival has become in eight short years," Lominack said.

"We know that supporting the arts benefits the business community as well as the economic development potential of our area by creating an attractive quality of life. This is why we continue to support Artisphere."

See Artisphere's Web site at www.artisphere.us.