Artisphere returns with new features

Changes aim to keep festival fresh, interesting

By Paul Hyde
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Greenville's big visual arts festival, Artisphere, returns on Friday with a host of new features.

An expanded demonstration area, a juried exhibition of student work, expanded activities for children and a series of how-to talks all are a part of this year's festival, said Artisphere executive director Kerry Murphy.

New, too, are Friday's festival hours, from noon until 8 p.m. In the past, the festival didn't start until 4 p.m. on opening day.

Artisphere will continue with its usual hours on Saturday (10 a.m. to 8 p.m.) and Sunday, May 12 (11 a.m. to 6 p.m.).

Now in its ninth year, Artisphere draws tens of thousands to downtown Greenville to browse for art and enjoy food, live music and activities for children.

At the center of the festival are the 120 booths featuring the work of artists from around the nation. Of the artists featured this year, more than half are attending the festival for the first time, Murphy said.

Among the new features is a Demo/DIY (Do It Yourself) Stage, with artists creating and talking about ceramic making, painting, weaving, monoprinting and jewelry.

The DIY Stage will be located on Main Street near the entrance to Falls Park.

"We did some demonstrations on that stage last year, but we also featured some musicians," Murphy said. "This year it's dedicated solely to demonstrators. There's a full slate of activities planned. One thing that fascinates me is a smart-phone art demonstration by David Gerhard of Clemson University. You can learn how to create art on a smart phone."

In addition, Artisphere will feature a new juried art exhibition by Greenville County high school students, with prizes for the best work, Murphy said.

The exhibition, to be located under a tent in the courtyard of the downtown Marriott, will involve 14 Greenville high schools and include 200 or more works of art, Murphy said.

Artisphere also will be sending local professional artists into some schools to offer guidance, said Murphy.

The festival is increasingly trying to bring teen artists into the fold. The event has long featured activities for younger children through its Kidsphere attraction.

"We're trying to reach out to the schools," Murphy said. "We want them to be more involved."

Also new to the festival will

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YOU CAN GO

What: Artisphere, a celebration of the visual arts, also featuring food, live music and activities for children
Where: Downtown Greenville
When: Noon to 8 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday; 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, May 12
Admission: Free
Information: 864-271-9398 or www.artisphere.us

ARTISPHERE
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This year's Artisphere includes more demonstrations. Ryan Calloway of Creative Ironworks was featured last year. STAFF/FILE



Artists' row showcases the work of 120 artists from around the nation. STAFF/FILE

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be talks on topics such as home light design and how to buy art with confidence, Murphy said.

"We're really trying to be more accessible and engage all different types of art enthusiasts," Murphy said.

The Kidsphere section of Artisphere will offer expanded activities for children, including basket weaving, creating paper laterns, painting watercolor masks, building splatter sculptures and decorating ceramic tiles.

"Artisphere is never the same festival twice," said Judith Aughtry, president of the festival's board of directors. "But it consistently provides the rare opportunity to meet top-notch visual and performing artists in a unique atmosphere, and it always promises to be a special experience."

Artisphere earned record sales last year for participating artists and won top accolades from nationally recognized publications, Murphy said.

In 2012, the 120 artists involved in the outdoor festival reported an average of $5,865 in sales over the three-day event.

That represents an increase from 2011 of about 16 percent, or $800 on average for each artist.

The festival placed No. 7, meanwhile, in the Fine Art category in Greg Lawler's annual Art Fair Sourcebook, a ranking of the top 600 art shows across the nation.

The event also placed No. 10 in the Fine Craft category. Those rankings were based largely on artist sales.

"Those rankings are definitely something the artists and the art buyers look to when the artists are applying to shows and the buyers are seeking shows to visit throughout the country," Murphy said.

Strong sales results encourage accomplished artists nationwide to apply for the festival, potentially boosting the quality and variety of artworks available every year at the event.

For this year's festival, 854 artists applied from 41 states.

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