Artisphere to bring more artists into the picture

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Artisphere is growing up, and this year the Greenville arts festival that draws talent from across the United States and abroad also is growing out.

After the festival received a record number of almost 700 artist applications, its diverse artist row is expanding for the first time in its six-year history from 100 to 120 artists.

"We didn't want to grow just for the purposes of growth, but we felt there were a number of fantastic artists that just because of space limitations were not making it into the festival," said Artisphere Executive Director Kerry Murphy.

Artisphere's artist applications have jumped almost 250 percent since the festival began, from 282 in 2004 to 682 this year, Murphy said. The festival remains a juried show, with artists chosen by a jury of experts.

The growth won't affect the physical size of the festival — it will still run from South Main Street and Broad through Greenville's historic West End — but organizers did do a little "maneuvering" to accommodate changes, Murphy said.

The Culinary Arts Café will be a bit smaller and this year will move to West Camperdown Way. The change will allow for 20 more artist spaces up to the intersection of South Main and Augusta streets.

Artisphere received acclaim this year when it was named one of the top 10 arts festivals in the 2009 "Art Fair Sourcebook" by Greg Lawler. The weekend event last May drew 100,000 people.

Event organizers tried a change last year when they moved the three-day festival from April to May, a move Murphy said proved to be positive. She has high hopes for this one as well, but said balancing growth while maintaining Artisphere's integrity is key.

"There is a real appeal to the setting as it is right now in the downtown area and Falls Park and the intimacy of that," Murphy said. "I think we've done a good job with 100, and we think there is some growth we're capable of this year. So we'll re-evaluate after 2010 and go from there."