City plans Fourth of July festivities

BY LADONNA BEEKER
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SENECA — One festival down and another in the works.

Seneca officials are finalizing plans for the city's Fourth of July festivities, which will be held at the Gignilliat Center. The Events Committee is still working out details for activities for children and families during its recent meeting; however, one thing was final and that is entertainment.

Events Coordinator Riley Johnson said The Tams, of Atlanta, would take the stage at 8 p.m. July 4. The group is expected to perform until about 10 p.m.

The Tams formed in 1962 and its current members are Charles Pope, his son Li'l Redd, Robert Arnold, Elton Richardson and Reginald Preston. The group performs what most refer to as beach music, but it also includes smooth soul and R&B.

Organizers are considering carnival rides, but city staff is researching prices and availability. The city's budget for the Fourth of July event is $35,000, which comes from Hospitality Accommodations Tax (HAT) funds.

Looking back on Seneca Fest, which was held downtown on Memorial Day weekend, city officials were pleased, but one thing was agreed upon — more children's activities next year.

"We need something for the kids next year," Johnson said, suggesting carnival rides for Seneca Fest.

Dr. John Martin, who organized the Seneca Fest Promenade and Townville Walk, said the new arts portion needs tweaking, but overall, it was satisfactory.

"The look was there," Martin said. "It was a good start. It just needs refining."

Also, the switch from fireworks to a laser show to end the last night of Seneca Fest was a crowd-pleaser, Johnson said.

For next year, Johnson suggested cutting back funds in other areas to bring in a "bigger act" for entertainment.

"We've always wanted to shoot for the stars," said committee chairman and councilman Joel Ward.

Finance Director Joel Seavey said adding a bigger act can bring Seneca Fest's budget close to $80,000. This year, $65,000 was spent with $14,710 brought in from vendors and the 5K run, so that's about $50,000 total spent from the city's HAT funds.

One final change for next year is more advertising and communication with downtown merchants. Ward, along with committee members, agreed more signs, emails and other communication forms are needed to emphasize the free events and the need for everyone to be involved.

"I'd like to see that communication to make sure (the city staff, public and businesses) are on the same page," Ward said, adding if downtown businesses aren't open during festivals, he wants to know why.

Ward said Seneca's website got 13,000 hits for the Seneca Fest, which included 9,000 new site visitors.

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