Jazz on the Alley beneficial to most downtown businesses

BY LADONNA BEEKER
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Jazz on the Alley has one month left to wrap up its first year, and so far, most Ram Cat Alley business owners think the series has benefited the city greatly.

"It's been wonderful," Green Springs owner Alison Springs said. "Jazz on the Alley has brought new faces downtown. It's great to be in a city that's supportive of small businesses."

Springs said she lives an hour away from Seneca, but chose to place her store in the city because of the community atmosphere and how involved city officials are in helping business owners.

"Council members asked, 'What can we do for you?' Spring said; adding the city's generosity made her decision to locate her business in Seneca easier.

A majority of Springs' clients expect her to be open for Jazz on the Alley because of her continued dedication to the event.

She said her store is open most of the time, and overall, she said it's been successful for her.

The Spot on the Alley owner Stuart Pohl said Jazz on the Alley has increased his business and brought it back up to the pace it was pre-recession.

"It's bringing folks to our place that didn't know we existed," Pohl said. "We are getting (sales) numbers we haven't had in five years."

Pohl said he and his wife, Wendy, have to limit the number of tables they place outside for Jazz on the Alley to make sure they don't overextend the

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IF YOU GO

Jazz on the Alley is 6:30-9 p.m. today.

Oconee Medical Center is also joining the city's event to celebrate the hospital's 10 years of private funds. The OMC event is 5:30-6:30 p.m. today on Ram Cat Alley with cake, favors and displays.



FOR THE JOURNAL

Jazz on the Alley brings people from across Oconee County and surrounding areas to hear music while enjoying food and getting a peek at what nearby shops have to offer.

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amount of food that can be produced in their kitchen.

"We have to help keep up with food on a timely manner," Pohl said. "There is that much demand."

Patina on the Alley owner Kim Guidera agrees and sees Jazz on the Alley as a new way to highlight the city's downtown area.

"Jazz on the Alley brings people in that can't get down during the weekday," Guidera said. "A majority of the time, a lot of people come eat, walk around and enjoy the businesses."

Guidera said she's open on Jazz on the Alley nights as her schedule allows. From her experience, she said many people walk through her store during the event, but come back another day to make purchases.

The lack of purchases made during Jazz on the Alley has kept some businesses closed on Thursday nights.

"We don't open because there are not a lot of people in stores," said Marti Brzoza, part owner of Sensibly Chic. "The people mainly like being out and walking around."

Brzoza's husband and business partner, Tom, agreed.

"People come for music and food, not for shopping," he said. "Jazz on the Alley has helped with exposure. A lot of people that didn't know about Ram Cat Alley now know."

Despite Sensibly Chic being closed during Jazz on the Alley, Marti Brzoza said many people have returned to her store within days of the event to purchase an item they saw in the window while attending Thursday's event.

Events coordinator Riley Johnson said with 200 to 500 visitors at any Jazz on the Alley, he would like to see all downtown businesses open.

"I would love to see all the stores open," Johnson said. "I think it would be great. If it's not possible, we understand."

Johnson recommends those businesses who cannot be open for Jazz on the Alley should put fliers outside advertising what's inside, store hours and other information to encourage people to return.

Johnson said people like to see activity in their community, and that's what Jazz on the Alley has provided.

"It was an idea a year ago; now it's a clothing line," Johnson said.

Because Jazz on the Alley has grown, Seneca went from originally using Hospitality Accommodations Tax funds to organize the event, to it becoming completely sponsored. Finance Officer Joel Seavey said HAT money used to start Jazz on the Alley was reimbursed by sponsorship funds.

Johnson said the city is working to add two more sponsors to Jazz on the Alley for next year's series.

LOOKING AHEAD

Jazz on the Alley continues through Oct. 29 when it will have its grand finale, which includes an oyster roast. Johnson said typically bands are not booked for October to allow for make-up nights for any rained-out events. However, he said Jazz on the Alley has not had to reschedule any of its spring concerts, so four bands were newly scheduled for October's series.

Also, for the final month, Johnson said the city is going to try to move the stage to the other end of Ram Cat Alley to switch things up and allow the crowd to see businesses at that end.

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