Seneca Fest kicks off downtown today

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Photos of performers and events hang on the wall of Riley Johnson's office. On Monday morning, the Seneca events coordinator was scheduling, finalizing payments for acts and talking to local media all while playing a bit of upbeat retro music in the background.

He even tested out a few light-up glasses that hundreds of participants will sport during an evening 5K race tonight.

"Everyone running in the race gets these," Johnson said, sliding the glasses on.

Memorial Day festivities kicked off early in Seneca with blues night Thursday evening at Jazz on the Alley. They will continue today and Saturday for Seneca Fest.

The daylong events are jam-packed with food, rides, crafts and entertainment for the whole family, who may not often see those behind the scenes who work for months cranking out new ideas and finding ways to attract people to the city festival.



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Glenn Laughter and Teddy Greene get the Mile High Concessions trailer ready to cook before Jazz on the Alley in downtown Seneca on Thursday night. Mile High will be on hand for the Seneca Fest today and Saturday, serving fresh-cut french fries, homemade corndogs, fresh lemonade and Philly cheesesteaks.

Johnson said he's used to planning the event, and this week was the last of prepping.

"This is all your pregame here," Johnson said Monday. "You're making sure all the vendors are

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where they need to be — all the power, all the water, the barbecue-ers coming in — letting everybody know what time we're doing what."

But it isn't Johnson alone pulling the strings — the city events committee and police and fire officials are right behind, making sure everything flows as smoothly as possible.

Johnson said everyone involved met last fall to decide what this year's festival would look like.

"The events committee decided, 'Let's bring it back downtown.' It works so well," he said. "And the downtown merchants missed us. The barbecue-ers missed us. Now we're back to stay downtown — hopefully for a long, long time."

Norton Thompson Park might be bursting at the

councilman Ronnie O'Kelley expects around 8,000 to 10,000 people to visit.

Seneca police Lt. Brian Sheriff said the crowd poses some different challenges for police, but he is expecting it to go well.

"We put on a few extra men than what we normally used at Gignilliat, and we plan together what roads we're going to close at different times," Sheriff said. "With us moving it back downtown, it's going to be a little bit harder on us this year to get it situated, but once we get up and rolling, we shouldn't have any problems."

Due to construction, the stage had to be moved and will be positioned a bit to the left of its former site.

Headliner Jefferson Starship will perform Saturday night, with opening acts Stone Echo and Sam Burchfield hitting the stage first.

Seneca mayor Dan Alex-

"Riley and the events committee did a great job," Alexander said. "We're really looking forward to a lot of people coming into town."

Now that crunch time has dwindled down for planners, festival-goers may find themselves wondering what to do and where to go.

CHOW DOWN AND BURN IT OFF

Starting at noon today, the state's top barbecue cooks will make their way downtown for Saturday's barbecue cook-off. Visitors will be able to eat anything but the butts tonight, and the barbecue will be available by 6 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the BackPack program of Oconee County.

Seneca's f rst Glo In the Nite R un will begin around 9 p.m. at the Shaver Recreatic nal Complex.

Johnson s aid runners

glow sticks and bracelets will head into Adams subdivision and turn around and come back.

"Everybody in Adams on Ploma, West Quincy and Quincy — if you live on those streets, please, please come out and cheer those people on," Johnson said.

A leftover fun run will be held at Shaver for children at the race. All kids will walk away with a medal and can enjoy Domino's pizza and Dunkin' Donuts afterward.

HEAD DOWNTOWN OR TAKE A TOUR

Between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Saturday, people will be able to enjoy caricature drawings, balloons and corn hole with merchants on Ram Cat Alley.

"There's going to be the fire jugglers again this year, and then we're going to have a folk band," said Rob Perry, co-owner of Rob and Reana's.

, and it costs nothing'

artists' tents will also be set up for demonstrations.

Golf carts will be waiting at the old Bergen's building for part of the afternoon to transport people for historic tours of the Ballenger House, the Lunney House Museum and the Blue Ridge Arts Center.

"Those golf carts will run continuously, so people can stop in one and visit and take a tour of the other," Lunney director John Martin said. "It's a way to showcase the Lunney and the Ballenger and BRAC, the arts and museums and history."

FESTIVAL RIDES AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Seneca Library is the site where children can enjoy free fair rides, and Johnson said library officials are excited to get kids interested in the summer reading program.

"They were trying to think of a way to market to kids, and I said, 'Well I'm about to put 500 in your doorstep — how many can you handle?" Johnson said.

The fun doesn't stop with the children — Johnson believes Seneca Fest offers a bit of something for everyone.

"It's a free event and good for the community," he said. "We're the only game in town, and it costs nothing."

For a full itinerary of Seneca Fest events visit, seneca.sc.us/Events/SenecaFestWeekend.aspx

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