

ArtStroll's Sophomore Effort Attracts More Acts and Artists

Written by Jeff Ignatius
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In its first year, the ArtStroll street-fair event in downtown Davenport drew an estimated 2,000 people. "That's pretty good for a first-year event," said Dean Schroeder, executive director of MidCoast Fine Arts.

But MidCoast, which coordinates the event, isn't content with those first-year numbers. Schroeder said he's shooting for 4,000 people this year, and already the sampler platter of Quad Cities arts organizations has grown and diversified.

ArtStroll 2001 has five new presenting partners this year (for a total of 13), and the list shows a greater interest in music and theatre: Genesis Guild, the Quad City Music Guild, The Quad Cities Jazz Festival, the Mississippi Valley Blues Society, and CMBT (The Quad Cities Professional Ballet Company). ArtStroll 2001 will also feature three times as many artists as last year, with nearly 40 artists presenting live exhibits or demonstrations.

The four-block art party runs from 5 to 10 p.m. on Second Street in downtown Davenport, from Harrison Street to Pershing Avenue. The event is free and open to the public and is intended as a showcase of the strength of community arts organizations throughout the Quad Cities region – a one-evening event celebrating the Midwest Arts Mecca. (See the *River Cities' Reader*, Issue 324, May 23, 2001.)

ArtStroll can be described with any number of food metaphors, from sampler to buffet; people who come to ArtStroll can get a sense of the variety and number of artists and arts groups in the Quad Cities in a short period of time.

Food metaphors also work for the idea of having more presentations and presenters this year. "All these arts organizations are bringing a covered dish," Schroeder said. "It makes it much more easy to share in the work." Last year, for example, ensembles of the Quad City Symphony Orchestra performed for three hours; this year, they'll perform for one.

Schroeder attributes the event's growth to a recognition of what ArtStroll might become. "People are taking an interest," he said. "They're realizing this event's potential."

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Erin Lounsberry, a member of the committee that organizes ArtStroll who's also involved in the Quad City Symphony Orchestra and the Quad City Music Guild, said there was also a conscious effort to expand the event's reach. She said the committee realized that theatre wasn't represented and sought out the Music Guild and Genesis Guild.

With more organizations, Lounsberry said, ArtStroll might be able to draw a more diverse crowd. "Those different organizations have different followings," she said.

Part of the challenge with the inaugural ArtStroll was the timing. "By the time we locked in on a date, it was three or four months out," Schroeder said. The number of organizations involved "was a matter of expediency."

ArtStroll is bigger in ways beyond the number of presenters. Last year, 19 eight-foot-tall, double-sided art banners were auctioned off; this year, three dozen banners – now hanging along Second Street – will be sold.

More organizations helped distribute fliers and get the word out, too. That includes new presenters, but also the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce and radio stations.

ArtStroll will also be an event for the public to see organizations in transition. CMBT will unveil its new name at the event, and the public will have a chance to explore the new plans for the Davenport Museum of Art's Figge Arts Center.

While the museum had created designs based on a location of the southeast corner of Second and Harrison streets, the new design will face River Drive and extend the full block from Harrison Street to Main.

"The strategic plan ... really needed to be more broad," said Dana Wilkinson, executive director of the Davenport Museum of Art Foundation. "We needed to develop that whole block." While the old design was seven levels spread over the equivalent of 11 stories, the new plan calls for three major levels and a building that's as tall as a five- or six-story building.

The physical dimensions and location have changed, but the Davenport Museum of Art is focusing on other elements. "We don't think of it so much as a big change but a big improvement," Wilkinson said.

The project's cost and square footage remain about the same, Wilkinson said, but the new design – facilitated by Firststar Bank granting air rights to its property on the south side of the block – will allow for a number of new features: an outdoor public square, a sculpture garden, "a front yard," a drop-off drive, and a better façade toward the river.

The Davenport Museum of Art will have blown-up copies of the new schematic designs at ArtStroll.

The event will also feature the public premiere of the Art-O-Mobile; a graffiti mural done live near Firststar Bank at Main Street; and performances by the Quad City Juggling Club.

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"There's too much happening in five hours," Schroeder said.