The Riverssance Festival of Fine Art will be losing one of its founders after this year's event, with Larry DeVilbiss stepping down from his second stint as director.

DeVilbiss has run the festival for the vast majority of its 19 years - he returned three years ago when MidCoast Fine Arts took over the event - but he'll be leaving after this weekend's edition, being held Saturday and Sunday in the Village of East Davenport's Lindsay Park. (The *River Cities' Reader* is a sponsor of the event. A Riverssance map is located on the back cover of this week's issue.)

But while Dean Schroeder, MidCoast's executive director, called the transition an infusion of "new blood, young blood," it's the *same* blood in some respects. DeVilbiss' daughter Samantha will be taking the reins in 2007.

"Larry sees this as a comfortable passing of the baton," Schroeder said.

"I had been desperately looking for someone," Larry DeVilbiss said about finding his replacement. But it was Samantha who approached *him* about taking over the annual arts festival.

Don't expect fundamental changes to Riverssance, though. The festival will still likely feature roughly 100 juried artists, live music, a children's art tent, food, and a wine garden - as it does this year - but Samantha DeVilbiss will try to bring a younger demographic to the event. She said that although she doesn't have specific changes in mind yet, she'd like to bring in younger artists who could reassert the festival's relevance to people in their 20s, and target the marketing to younger people, as well. The incoming director is 23 years old and works as a substitute teacher at Davenport's West High School, where her father teaches art.

"I've known the board pretty much since I was a child," she said.

The younger DeVilbiss has assisted with MidCoast events such as Riverssance, Gallery Hops, and the Great Mask Auction in the past and is presently the organization's volunteers coordinator.

Schroeder said the MidCoast board doesn't have an agenda for changing Riverssance. "There is no specific wish list from the board at this point," he said.

Improving attendance will be one likely goal. After drawing 15,000 people in MidCoast's first year at the helm, attendance has settled at around 12,000. Some of that can be blamed on the economy, or the weather, or competition from other events, but it also suggests that Riverssance has succumbed to festival fatigue - the age at which an event loses some of its audience because it's no longer quite as fresh.

Schroeder said that Riverssance has done amazingly well compared to other major events, whose audiences typically erode after a decade or less. "Riverssance has held up extremely well," he said.

This year's event won't feature many new attractions, but it has drawn some new participants. The Illinois Quad City Chamber's Young Professionals Network will be using the wine garden as a fundraiser, and artists from MidCoast's Bucktown Center for the Arts will be leading activities in the children's area. The River Music Experience, which booked lived entertainment at last year's event, is taking a more active role in the live-music stage, introducing artists.

"Every event needs to be in constant evolution," Schroeder said.

*The Riverssance Festival of Fine Art runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, September 16, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, September 17, in Lindsay Park in the Village of East Davenport. Admission is $3.*

*For more information about Riverssance, visit ( http://www.midcoast.org ).*