



Cultivating an environment where the arts can flourish

Evolution of First Friday in the City of Lancaster, PA

The concept of extended hours on the first Friday of the month was initiated by Carol Foley Bolt at Central Market Gallery in 1999. Lancaster Galleries, the Demuth Museum, and the Lancaster Museum of Art quickly joined in. They promoted the evening receptions to their client/membership lists.

While First Fridays proved to be popular and drew crowds at these venues, the City of Lancaster itself was relatively quiet after hours. Only restaurants were open after 5 or 6pm. Through the Downtown Investment District (DID), the original First Friday group reached out to other businesses to communicate the value of participating in the monthly event. By 2001 articles and ads began appearing about Lancaster's First Fridays. Momentum accelerated late in 2001 as more galleries and businesses joined in the practice of extending their hours on the first Friday of each month.

First Fridays received another boost when the DID prepared a monthly newsletter listing all the participating venues and distributed photocopies around the city. First Fridays grew as the arts community grew. The Destination Downtown effort of the Lancaster Campaign became involved in promoting and planning First Fridays, too.

LancasterARTS was formed in 2007 to 'cultivate an environment where the arts can flourish.' It took on responsibility for First Fridays, making the monthly arts celebration its signature event. LancasterARTS began promoting First Fridays regionally, built a network of mid-Atlantic media contacts and launched an e-newsletter. LancasterARTS enhanced the First Friday guide with the inclusion of a detailed map as well as a transition to a full color glossy format. Significant content was added to the LancasterARTS.com website, transforming the site into the hub for the arts and the primary source for the most current and complete information on First Fridays and Lancaster's arts scene. Together, these actions contributed to significant growth over the next two years (2007 to 2009), with the number of First Friday participating arts venues increasing by 50%, First Friday attendance skyrocketing up 150%, and the number of web visitors and e-newsletter subscribers quadrupling.

Today, thousands of people from far and wide fill Lancaster's downtown sidewalks every month of the year to celebrate First Fridays. They come to enjoy the breadth and diversity of the arts community, the distinctive architecture, the unique boutiques, and exceptional dining available in this authentic urban environment and very walkable city. And, it's still growing.... spread the word!