

Local Flavor

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JULY 2019

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The Southside Rocks!

SANTA FE BANDSTAND

story by **CULLEN CURTISS**

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Outside In Productions Executive Director Michael Dellheim asks good questions. A while back, he and his board examined the landscape around one of their bigger productions, Santa Fe Bandstand, a free, live-summer-music series on Santa Fe's downtown Plaza, and asked: "How can we be voted the Best Community Event in the Santa Fe Reporter's [Best of Santa Fe] Reader Poll, and not serve the whole community?"

Of course, they meant, how can we not serve the Southside (arguably Districts 3 and 4), where our City center truly lives, where the growing population is rivaling that of the North and East?

While the question was somewhat rhetorical, the answer was action. Beginning in 2014, and every year since, the free summer music series can be heard on Santa Fe's Southside. It debuted on the Plaza San Isidro courtyard, but 2019 marks its third year at the hospitable home of SWAN Park, in the Tierra Contenta neighborhood, which will host four high-energy dance bands on July's four Saturdays. (The downtown Plaza will host 60-plus musical acts this summer.)

Michael admits he was initially unsure what might excite a Southside audience, but after five years, he's a cautiously confident curator. He is, after all, at every single show, every single night, all summer, setting up and breaking down, and emcee-ing. He also takes attendance twice in an evening, and reviews audience polls and feedback.

"No singer-songwriters," he says. "We lean toward dancing, getting out and moving. Big dance energy from bands that really connect to the audience and engage them, like last summer's Jenny and the Mexicats. We want those who will stay after and sign stuff, merchandise, whatever. We do not have a backstage or green room, so they have to like meeting people."

Michael uses the metaphor of tree rings to describe what happens at SWAN on these nights. "The dancers are up front; people who like music, but want to watch dancers are in the next ring; the picnickers are in the back; and the people who aren't sure or want to throw a Frisbee are on the field."

As a location manager for film in his previous career, Michael is fluent in programming spaces, but says it's still been an experiment. Not being an "if you build it, they will come" kind of guy, Michael works really hard to get the people to come, including renting six chauffeured carts that ferry music lovers between the auxiliary parking area and the field, an otherwise 7- to 10-minute jaunt. A combination of the City of Santa Fe, and Michael and his team spend Friday night and the bulk of a Saturday transforming a grassy, multi-use park into an inviting outdoor concert venue. "It works out there. There's grass forever and there's a playground. There are a lot of families and a lot of food," he says.

Attendance numbers were up by 30 percent in the second year at SWAN, and Michael has a gut feeling the numbers will continue to rise. "To see it pay off is really rewarding. It's really satisfying when people describe how important the series has become to their annual summer ritual," he says. "As a people pleaser, that's what I aim for."

And the people do seem pleased. City Councilor Roman "Tiger" Abeyta, whose District 3 encompasses SWAN Park says, "Having these performances at SWAN Park makes the residents on the Southside of town feel like they are part of the City of Santa Fe. While we all love going to the Plaza, it can be more difficult for Southside residents to attend the Plaza Bandstand concerts due to

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Stefano Fortunati



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the distance. Having music at SWAN Park brings an energy and atmosphere to the park that it otherwise may not get. Families with children from Tierra Contenta are the primary users of [the] park, but the music serves as a magnet that attracts all our residents, which was the primary purpose of the park.”

So, who will be the magnet this year? Michael says, “Al Hurricane [July 20] is going to be great. That rapport is going to be good. You can see Al, but he always does casinos, and that’s an expensive ticket. He’s a treat. He is Northern New Mexico.”

Michael describes Superfonicos [July 6], a band from Austin, Texas, that cost the nonprofit a bit extra due to their being out-of-towners, as “great, super lively, energetic.” And he adds, “Horns!”

Son Como Son [July 27] will bring their hot and exquisite salsa, compelling the picnickers off the ground, and Detroit Lightning [July 13] will deliver their signature Grateful Dead sounds, encouraging twirling, and ear-to-ear smiles.

And when he’s thanked his last sponsor, given his final applause and unplugged that last amp, will Michael start planning next year’s Bandstand? “Sleep,” he answers.

Santa Fe Bandstand runs through Aug. 9.
Visit santafebandstand.org for more information.

Southside Summer presents movies and various themed celebrations for all ages at the Midtown Campus, Wise Fool, Santa Fe Place Mall, Meow Wolf and Romero Park.
Visit santafenm.gov/southsidesummer.

