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2006 Blue Plum Festival - Organizers beefing up kids' areas



ETSU junior Ashley Graham is shown with her winning T-shirt design for the upcoming Blue Plum Festival. (Tony Duncan / Johnson City Press)

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Visitors to this year's Blue Plum Festival in downtown Johnson City will get their usual share of Americana/newgrass music, and the festival is beefing up its kids' areas, animation competition and the event's Web site.

Organizers also unveiled Blue Plum's 2006 sponsors, logo and T-shirt design during an informal news conference Thursday at Nelson Fine Art. The festival, entering its seventh year, will take place June 2-3.



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Last year Blue Plum attracted an estimated 65,000 people, its largest crowd ever.

The free festival has built a reputation for providing back-to-back, day-long lineups of Americana-based music ranging from bluegrass to jazz, blues, rock, country and various hybrids. Blue Plum is also known for its large fine arts and crafts festival.

This year's music lineup features Railroad Earth, The Drew Emmitt Band, The Waybacks, Martha Scanlan, Malcolm Holcombe and numerous others.

The kids' areas, a big hit last year under the coordination of Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church, will be expanded from one day to two days, going from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. General Shale is the co-sponsor.

"Some years for the festival, school is still going, but this year school will be out," Munsey's Dianna Cantler said. "We want the daytime part of the festival to be for kids just as much as adults, so we'll have a lot of stuff for kids, including a toddlers' area.

"The area will be roped off on Roan Street from Main to Market, and the theme is 'Treasure Island,' so it will be decorated like an island. Hands On! (Regional) Museum will be coming outside with some stuff, we'll have a scavenger hunt for the 10-to-12s and a lot more."

Admittance to the kids' area is free.

Festival coordinator Christine Murdock said the planning committee looked at what a mom and dad with children ages 7 and 12 would be able to do at the festival, and tried to make sure there was enough to satisfy everyone.

Focusing more on another age demographic was the upgrade of the festival Web site — www.blueplum.org — with a new look, more information and more links.

"It will just have much more content," Murdock said. "That can make it easier for people to answer questions on a lot of things. The big demographic for the music is the 20-somethings, and they go to the Web for everything."

"And the more information you can offer, the more interest there will be in it," added Sam Mays, who is responsible for the festival's creative design.

The Web site was built by iPlenus Solutions. Some areas of the site are still under construction.

The Blue Plum Animation Festival, hosted by East Tennessee State University, will have a bigger presence, including on the Web site, after a modest first year in 2005.

"Last year we didn't push it enough," Murdock said. "We needed more signage. But this year we'll have it inside The Charles, showing on a

big screen.”

The Charles is located on East Main Street just down from Nelson Fine Art.

The festival T-shirt design was the result of a contest through ETSU, and was won by Ashley Graham, a junior. It features the “Blue Plum Festival 2006” wording beginning on the front of the shirt, wrapping around to the back to reveal a plum-shaped mandolin (or mandolin-shaped plum, depending on how you look at it.)

Festival organizers announced a long list of sponsors — “Without these people, we would not be able to put on a free festival,” volunteer Kim Schneider said — with Holston Distributing sponsoring the main-stage music and BB&T sponsoring the Roan Stage. Alltel is sponsoring the music headliners.

Next to “Title Sponsor” there was no name. “We can’t announce the title sponsor yet,” Murdock said. “We have one, but for now, they’re the mystery sponsor.”

Alltel was the title sponsor the last two years.

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