

New Albany opens riverfront with music, fireworks

BY RICHARD GOOTEE

Richard.Gootee@newsandtribune.com

July 04, 2009 01:56 am

— The debut of the city’s revamped riverfront amphitheater went off with a bang Friday night — literally. Complete with a fireworks show and a performance by the rock band Ambrosia, Mayor Doug England kicked off the Independence Day weekend with some local help. Hours before the Grammy-nominated band took the stage, Flash Bak belted out the first official song at the venue, which was a rendition of Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode.”

Flash Bak bassist Thad Crone, 15, and 14-year-old singer and guitarist Josh Durin gave each other a fist bump to celebrate being the first official band at the venue. Crone, Durin and guitarist Pete Lamm, 14, go to Floyd Central High School, while drummer Seth Christian attends Jeffersonville High School.

“Opening up for Ambrosia, that was amazing. It was a complete honor to open up for such an event,” Crone said.

Ambrosia, which rose to fame in the 1970s and ’80s, recorded such hits as “You’re the Only Woman,” “Holdin’ on to Yesterday” and “Biggest Part of Me.”

Though England said the project wasn’t finished — some parts needed additional paint — he was thrilled by the new structure and event. He said the project has been a goal since he came back to the mayor’s office. “When I came back in office, they didn’t have anything at all and this is my dream so I went out and raised the money,” he said.

Christian’s mother and Ambrosia fan, Mindy Christian, raved about the renovations about as much as she talked about the lineup, though she couldn’t decide which band she was most excited about.

“We come down here often, and the changes that they have made are just amazing,” she said.

England said he expected a crowd of about 6,000 to 7,000 people, partly because of the weather, but also because of high gas prices and the sluggish economy.

“You’re going to see more and more people staying close to home and enjoying their own community,”

England said more than four hours before the scheduled light show. “... People around here are going to come out. I’m seeing the crowd already, and I think it is going to be a big, spectacular crowd,”

Frankfort, Ky., resident Jeff Kulas, 46, was one of the early arrivals in the crowd. Kulas said he came because he covered Ambrosia tracks in high school with various bands and also was told the concert’s other act — Louisville-based The Wulfe Bros. — put on an impressive show.

Kulas said he originally thought the concert was in Jeffersonville, but called the New Albany venue “awesome.”

City Councilman Steve Price and his band followed the teenagers on stage. He said events like Friday’s that encourage families to come out are what New Albany is all about.

England said many in the crowd told him how impressed they are by the city’s new addition. He estimated the event cost about \$26,000, but said the price tag was covered entirely by local businesses and organizations, including Duke Energy and the Horseshoe Foundation. The Tribune was an event sponsor as well.

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.

Photos



A man relaxes with his feet up on a rail as a crowd begins to grow at New Albany's Riverfront Park on Friday during the city's annual Fourth of July celebration. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



Ray'von Farley, 2, rocks out with his toy guitar as Flash Bak performs on stage at New Albany's Riverfront Park on Friday during the annual Fourth of July celebration. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



Jared Welch, 6, is joined with other children as they bounce around a large inflatable on Friday at New Albany's Riverfront Park during the annual Fourth of July celebration. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



Members of the music group Flash Bak perform on stage on Friday evening during the annual Fourth of July celebration at Riverfront Park in New Albany. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



Mayor Doug England address the crowd gathered at New Albany's Riverfront Park on Friday. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



People sit on fresh sod at New Albany's newly built amphitheater on Friday at Riverfront Park. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen