

Series to bring music to New Albany riverfront every Friday

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— Tonight will be about live music, family fun and fireworks on New Albany's riverfront — but it's just the beginning.

When Ambrosia finishes rocking the amphitheater stage this evening, it will only leave the newly completed half-shell desolate for a week. Formed by Mayor Doug England, the New Albany Riverfront Amphitheater Committee has secured a Friday night concert series that will bring different bands to the stage each week leading up to the Harvest Homecoming shows in October.

England's wife, Michelle, is co-chair of the committee along with Jerry Finn, executive director of the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County. After retiring following more than 40 years in the classroom as a teacher, Michelle England thought she would be getting a break from the daily grind.

But her husband has put her to work, and she is happy with the outcome.

"With the new amphitheater, this gives us an opportunity to do more than we could before," she said.

Local talent along with other bands from the surrounding area will be featured each Friday. On July 10, The Marlins will play the riverfront, followed by Uppa Creek with the Pirtles on July 17.

Planners are hoping for a big turnout for the July 24 Jazz Festival, which will feature noted New Albany jazz musician Jamie Aebersold. One of the bigger events at the riverfront will be the Celtic Festival, which will be part of the summer concert series but will likely fall on a Saturday, as the final details are still being worked out.

It is tentatively set for Aug. 22 and could turn into an annual event with New Albany and Louisville rotating as hosts for the festival.

BEYOND THE MUSIC

Beyond bands, Finn is focused on bringing theatrical performances to the riverfront, including acts by local high school performing arts departments. He said there is already great interest from prospective acts because of a resurgence of New Albany's downtown.

He called the mix of the Ohio River Greenway and the amphitheater as a "perfect match."

"Every Friday night there will be entertainment on the riverfront," Finn said. "People have seen enough stuff going on in New Albany that they see the potential."

That potential includes the recent success of the New Albany Farmers Market, located along Market Street.

Susan Kaempfer runs the market through Develop New Albany and also is on the riverfront committee.

Part of the group's mantra is to tie-in the amphitheater and the summer concert series to downtown merchants and events.

Kaempfer said restaurants could capitalize by offering pre-performance specials and after-show discounts to keep people downtown. With most of the Friday shows beginning at 7:30 p.m., she added businesses could host open houses to get potential customers in the door.

"I would capitalize off that if I was a merchant downtown," Doug England said.

The concert series requires funding, and the committee is actively seeking sponsors and donations. The mayor said the usual donors — such as Holiday Inn Express, the Horseshoe Foundation and Duke Energy — have stepped up to the plate, but there is still a need for more.

He said businesses should consider donating as a means to providing entertainment for their employees.

Kaempfer said it would be great name recognition as well.

"They'll get their names mentioned at the amphitheater and several times during the performance," Kaempfer

said.

With the Farmers Market planning an expansion of its property this year, Kaempfer said there will be two outlets for live music as well as possibly a movie series.

Michelle England said the riverfront committee is looking into hosting movies at the amphitheater this summer and the Farmers Market could do the same.

“With the enhancements to the Farmers Market and the amphitheater, we now have two venues for two different types of events,” Kaempfer said.

The concerts will be free and people can bring a picnic basket with them, Doug England said. No alcohol will be allowed, but a limited amount of vendors will be on hand selling hot dogs, chips and soft drinks.

The summer concert series was planned over about four weeks, but Finn said they will have the entire winter to prepare for next year’s schedule.

“We would like to engage a lot more people in the community — people who know more about the potential of things,” he said. “We would like by the first of May to have the entire calendar out.”

TONIGHT’S SHOW

- The gates open for tonight’s Independence Day celebration at 5 p.m. The event cost about \$35,000, with money raised by Mayor Doug England covering the cost. No taxpayer money was used for the show, England said. The musical lineup is highlighted by Ambrosia, and the group will take the stage last. The Wulfe Bros., Flashbak and Steve Price Band also will be performing, with fireworks to follow the show around 9:30 p.m.

UPCOMING SHOWS

- Some of featured performances coming up during the Friday summer concert series at the Riverfront Amphitheater include The Marlins on July 10, Soul Kustody on Aug. 14 and The Rumors on Sept. 4.

SO YOU KNOW

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