

Arts & Vine Festival fills void, elevates arts across the area

SANFORD — When the Sanford Pottery Festival ended five years ago after more than a decade of success, local artists weren't the only ones to feel a void.

Without a showcase drawing visitors and the regional spotlight, everyone felt the sting.

But local visionaries banded together — artists, officials and community leaders — to create the Sanford Arts & Vine Festival, a two-day celebration that blended popular elements of the pottery festival with new ideas to become what organizers call “a celebration of creativity, talent and tradition.”

This year's version of the festival concludes today at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center.

Tom Snell, a local insurance consultant who serves as marketing director for the Sanford Arts & Vine Festival Committee, was the prime mover and shaker behind the idea. He says the Sanford Area Chamber of Commerce quickly stepped in, and the festival has been a community effort ever since.

“This is the largest two-day event in Lee County and it brings a tremendous number of visitors to our area,” Snell said. “When we promote the festival, we are promoting Sanford and Lee County. And when we provide funding for a local arts-focused charity, we improve the caliber of the product that charity offers our community.”

The festival, which attracts dozens of ceramic artisans and scores of visitors, has elevated arts across the area. Snell says the festival has provided funding to the Sanford Brush and Palette Club, the Lee County Community Orchestra, Temple Theatre's educational outreach for youth and the Mann Center, a local facility that promotes the arts and currently sponsors the festival.

The annual event has an even broader impact. David Nestor helped cultivate a tent highlighting North Carolina craft beer and wine — the “vine” part of the Sanford Arts & Vine Festival. As co-owner of Adcock and Associates Real Estate, Nestor is community-oriented and says the festival reinforces Sanford's identity as an arts community.

“What Sanford has going right now is really special,” Nestor said. “With the Sanford Arts & Vine and events like StreetFest, that puts Sanford head and shoulders above other cities. As a real estate guy, I love it.”

Snell attributes the Sanford Arts & Vine Festival's strength to sound financial footing, solid leadership and ideas to expand its geographic reach. Adcock and Associates plans to launch a companion event during the holiday season, Sparkles and Spirits, which will mimic the original and donate its proceeds to the local Boys and Girls Clubs.

With the Arts & Vine Festival establishing itself as a cultural force and inspiring other events to elevate the local quality of life, that void is filled and Sanford's future as an arts community appears to be bright.