Festival Transforms Long Branch, Creates Excitement

From Sept. 20 to Sept. 27, the Long Branch festival, co-hosted by the Long Branch Business League, MHP and Montgomery Parks and Planning, brought twenty-one performances to a newly-built stage at Flower Urban Park while transforming bare asphalt into creative public spaces with exciting nooks and crannies.

The festival also transformed local perceptions of what downtown Long Branch is all about.

For an entire week, Long Branch became a place of music, learning, good food and fun. Performances varied from rock improv to traditional guitar to science education.

Opening night, Columbo Percutiva (pictured at right) brought to the stage its distinctively warm Columbian style of Latin rock.

The number of such dancers increased exponentially on the final Friday, when a 35-member Salvadoran marching band brought many hundreds of excited viewers to the park.

For children, on Saturday, Sept. 21, thanks to Montgomery Parks, a massive climbing

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Long Branch Stores Contribute to County Business Improvement Effort

At the Business League’s Sept. 11 meeting, representatives of the County’s ‘4Business’ initiative spoke with Long Branch business owners about improving the climate here for small business.

The County delegation included Judy Stephenson, small business navigator, and Daniel Koroma, the business liaison officer for Montgomery County. Both encouraged the Long Branch business owners present to provide feedback on their own experience and concerns.

“People often say that it is easier to do business in Prince George’s or Fairfax counties,” Stephenson noted, adding that their goal is to make regulations less burdensome without hurting safety.

José Rodríguez, owner of the Americana Grocery store and shopping center, said that permitting is in fact easier for him in both Prince George’s County and in Fairfax. “Montgomery County is number three,” he said. Rodríguez said it would be helpful if Permitting Services had one place for small projects and another, separate space for those with large projects.

Ana Rivera, owner of el Gavilan Restaurant, said that her biggest concern was the unpredictability of permitting. “The first time I came to Permitting Services for a project, they told me ‘this is all you need,’ but then the next time it turned out something different was needed.” The result was a lot of circling around and wasted time.

“It would be great if we could be given a firm list of what we need right at the beginning,” Rivera noted.

Koroma and Stephenson both encouraged the business owners to contact them when such situations arise, as they can often help resolve such difficulties.

At the same time, Stephenson added, the County can also be a source of new business for those who take advantage of its billion-dollar a year procurement process.

The procurement office holds a monthly open house where, noted Stephenson, “You can just show up and see what you are interested in doing.” The next open house will be Wednesday, Oct. 16, from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. at 235 Rockville Pike, suite 180, Rockville.

Judy Stephenson can be contacted at 240-777-2012; Daniel Koroma can be contacted at 240-777-2584.

Marching Band ‘el Pulgarcito’ wows the crowd on the closing night.

Long Branch Festival Rocks Out, Attracts Hundreds (from p. 1)

Led by John Brill, CHEER’s Community Empowerment Coordinator (and Business League member), the Long Branch Festival’s Vision Committee designed for use throughout the week-long festival a lively, bilingual space called ‘Imagine Our Future in Long Branch.’ Held in the festival’s Friendship Lane, it allowed attendees to share their feelings about Long Branch resources today and in the future.

Over 75 people completed Asset Mapping/Visioning Surveys. Others wrote on color-coded sticky notes what they wanted to keep, get rid of, or add to Long Branch life! Neighbors are literally talking non-stop about how great it is to have activity and music in the park.”

Music performers were equally enthused. Colombo Percutiva praised the beautiful setting and the chance to perform directly for the community.

The leader of the Empresarios, Javier Miranda, told the Newsletter that his group performs all year long in big clubs and festivals, but that the whole group had felt that Long Branch Festival had been the best and was their favorite.

Artist Calder Brannock, the festival’s artistic director, voiced particular satisfaction with the transformation of the alleyway at Pupusa Alley. With its new mural, temporary paintings and hanging decorations, Pupusa Alley was indeed enchanting – especially during the touching performance there by Cuban guitarist Reimy Perez Bauta.

Long Branch businesses were, of course, at the heart of the festival and its success. El Golfo, El Gavilan and la Casita restaurants sold their authentic Latin food at the now-famous Pupusa Alley. Other Long Branch stores, such as Roxanna Flowers & Gifts, Veronica’s Bakery & Café, P&P computers and El Arbor de Pan Bakery got involved by holding store specials and discounts during the festival week.

CHEER, Montgomery Planning, Audubon Naturalist, MHP, Build Vision during Festival

John Marcolin of Montgomery Planning added further depth to the ‘Imagine Long Branch’ effort. After giving visitors a virtual tour of the Long Branch Sector Plan, he offered them a fun, interactive (and very popular) way to vote on what they would like to see in a public space in the center of Long Branch.

Volunteers from Latin American Youth Center, Friends of Sligo Creek and LEDC, also contributed to this visioning effort. To learn more about the Vision Committee, contact John Brill at: john@communitycheer.org, 240-328-8180.