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Citywide Sidewalk Sale underscores Lafayette's small town feel

By Lou Fancher



Photo J. Wake

What better way can there be to celebrate summer by starting the day on July 30 with free coffee and breakfast treats enjoyed with family, friends and neighbors at the Lafayette Plaza Park? The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and the City of Lafayette will host the morning soiree accompanied by local artists and business owners whose booths will add zing - and a warm-up - to the annual Citywide Sidewalk Sale event.

After the libations, shoppers on the streets and sidewalks of Lafayette will engage in the civic action of commerce to support local retail, restaurants and service providers. Participating shopkeepers, restaurant owners and a variety of locally-owned businesses offer special discounts and sales throughout the day.

Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson says that "great cities need to have certain elements to make them great. The first is a really good story. It needs to be historical or have a strong sense of place. Lafayette has its Green Hills and Great Schools stories. Like many small towns, Lafayette struggles with the pressure of building more housing and the desire to keep the community semi-rural. Lafayette embraces new concepts and trends. We have three big landowners in town who have worked very hard to find the right mix of locally owned small businesses and national brands. It's the best of all worlds."

Underscoring Lifson's obvious enthusiasm for local business promotion is a deep-rooted belief in the history of cities. He says the mix of businesses and buildings that have been in Lafayette for decades and newcomers to the marketplace in renovated digs brings to his mind memories of Chicago. "The mix of really old architecture and the rebuilding of Chicago after the great fire in 1871 had many modern buildings popping up. They were all so different and they blended together well."

Longtime businesses in Lafayette participating in the sidewalk sale festivities include Diablo Foods, McCaulou's Department Store, Blodgett's Flooring, Orchard Nursery, Clocks, Etc. and Wine Thieves, all locally owned. The 10 years leading up to the pandemic had Venture Quality Goods, Luck, Harper Greer, Lamorinda Music and Amphora opening their doors. "Post COVID has added a wonderful mix of shops and restaurants like White Barn Home, Kiku Sushi, Lafayette Public House, Local Kitchens, Two Girls One Plant and Hollie's Homegrown," Lifson says.

At Plaza Park, popup vendors will introduce new companies such as DateBox Club, Fabula Tea, Local Food Adventures, Lola's Sweet Treats, Old Road Brand, Whitchurch Glass Designs, Onodo Art and BlueGoo Photography. The Park Theater Trust will display their new merchandise and share updated information about their mission to revitalize the Park Theater into an accessible, inclusive, community-centered cinema and arts and culture hub.

? Asked about the challenges of public gatherings held during the pandemic and annual or bi-annual events returning as the community emerges from the public health crisis but are still worn down by COVID and the economic inflation of summer 2022, Lifson says without hesitation that restoring a vital downtown is difficult, but not impossible.

"The pandemic was consistent in one way. It was completely inconsistent," Lifson says. "Collectively, our community did everything they could to live in the moment, change with the mandates and rules, and adapt to the next phase as quickly as possible. With the exception of masking and attendance in schools, Lafayette did not have the same resistance that other cities had. Residents behaved and our business became very nimble and flexible to handle the curve balls that were thrown our way."

? Noteworthy of the chamber's achievements this year, Lifson says, is launching the first Community Day and hosting the second Sidewalk Sale Day. "We are returning to the events we celebrate when it's safe. Our community, our bleacher buddies, our neighbors and customers are hungry to get back to enjoying each other."

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[back](#)

