

Norfolk street festival invites you to meet the arts

NORFOLK

The first time the city closed Granby Street on a Friday night for a half-mile-long block party in September, no one was sure how it would go over. Maybe it would be a bust, or maybe it would be a wild success.

The 7,000 people who packed downtown that night provided a resounding answer, and they made something else clear, too: They wanted more.

This Friday, they'll get it.

Once again, the city will close Granby to drivers and open it to artists, musicians, food vendors and revelers.

A few things will be different, though. This "Meet and Greet" festival, as the city has dubbed them, will focus on the arts, and it is timed to coincide with the kickoff of the annual Virginia Arts Festival, which runs through May.

"We're definitely bringing back the string-bulb lights and the cool vibe," city spokeswoman Lori Crouch said. "But this one is truly going to be an arts event, too."

The Virginia Arts Festival arranged most of the night's programming. Between street performers and the two stages that will be built for the event, there should be something for everyone, said Rob Cross, the Virginia Arts Festival's executive director.

"We want it to be casual," Cross said, "and accessible to the whole community."

Among the performers: singers with the Virginia Opera, the Hurrah Players, the Rhythm Project, The Reel Thing Irish dancers, the Governor's School for the Arts orchestra, the Celtic ensemble Glasgow Kiss, and the Newport News Police Pipe and Drum Corps.

There will also be interactive art exhibits, plenty of food and a beer garden, Cross said. He said the hope is that people will come downtown for dinner, then attend the festival and then maybe catch a show.

The Birmingham Royal Ballet performs "Coppélia" at Chrysler Hall at 7:30 p.m. Friday, and the Virginia Stage Company performs "The Odd Couple" at the Wells Theatre at 8 p.m. (Those events require tickets.) Also at 8 p.m., Mexican-Canadian electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer will premier "Airborne," an outdoor projection installation showing at the corner of Bank and Charlotte streets.

The city is planning two more Meet and Greet festivals with different themes for later this year.

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