

FESTIVALS ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The NEON Festival is coming. Here's what should be on your must-see list.



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THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

OCT 10, 2019 |
AM

7:55

NORFOLK



One of the signs that marks Norfolk's Neon district at the corner of W. Brambleton Ave. and Granby St. in Norfolk, Virginia. (L. Todd Spencer)

The 700 block of Granby Street is unrecognizable from its former facade.

Five years ago, most storefronts on the stretch between Brambleton Avenue and Harrison Opera House on West Virginia Beach Boulevard showcased cobwebs and dust, except for an eclectic hair salon and a furniture store. Abandoned lots were home to trash. Not a single planting breathed fresh air into the area.

The NEON District changed all of that, as its name — the New Energy of Norfolk — illustrates, proving that pops of color go a long way.

Established half a decade ago, the first

dedicated arts district brought life to the neighborhood that shares a major thoroughfare with downtown Norfolk.

Clothing shops and art galleries popped up, restaurants opened and urban horticulture took root. Vivid murals decorate previously disregarded walls in an initiative that has crept farther and farther from the NEON's epicenter.

This week residents will have ample opportunity to celebrate the milestone at the [**5th annual NEON Festival**](#).

Events are planned to engage all ages. The public can explore kickoff parties, new murals, art installation openings, backstage tours the district's newest and largest gathering space.

Charles Rasputin, fest co-organizer and NEON co-founder, said the two-day event is bigger and better than before, in large part to the community that keeps the district thriving.

"Before the NEON, there was always an undercurrent of an art-driven subculture that existed in Norfolk in a way that it didn't in other cities. We were able to cultivate a neighborhood that needed some life without displacing anyone by keeping folks that were already there in the conversation. Between that inclusion and showcasing public art and the creative energy of our residents, it's what has made the NEON a success," Rasputin said.

If you are heading to the NEON Festival on Thursday and Friday, here are five things to put on your must-see list.

THURSDAY, OCT. 17

The Official Kick-Off, Chrysler Museum of Art

Starting at 5 p.m., the museum will host live music, lawn games and more — all for free.

Take your pick of joining in on [Glow Yoga](#) on the lawn, four music performances throughout the evening, a Glass Studio performance and NEON mural tours. The full schedule of Chrysler's happenings can be [found on Facebook](#).

NEON X PRIDE, Duke Grace Building Garage

What's cooler than an outdoor party in a place not really meant for parties? Not much.

Rasputin said this party will deliver all the vibes. Hosted by the NEON and Hampton Roads Pride, [this celebration](#) will have underground music and live art from 5 to 10 p.m. It's all ages, but for those 21 and older, O'Connor Brewing Company will be on-site pouring pints.

Third Thursday at the Glass Studio, Chrysler Museum Glass Studio

During a live performance, artist Esteban del Valle – the painter responsible for the “We Can Create What We Can Imagine” mural seen on the side of Culture Lounge and Restaurant – will paint in response to glass blowers and musicians around him. Tickets are free but must be reserved at [Chrysler.org](#).

FRIDAY, OCT. 18

Main Stage, The Plot

Back to where it all started – The Plot. There will be no shortage of entertainment streaming through the heart of the NEON. The fun starts at 6 p.m. and includes a beer garden, games, family-friendly activities, food trucks, a pop-up Prince Ink T-shirt shop, live music and performances from Virginia Stage Company, Teens With a Purpose and the Governor’s School for the Arts, walking art tours, a set from Freshtopia’s DJ Bee and a dance party.

NEON Emporium: Temporal Projections, The NEON House

Five years later, the NEON District is still expanding. This time, the neighborhood has claimed a giant space that previously housed

Exotic Home, located at 819 Granby St. Starting at 6 p.m., you can get your first peek at the new venue during [NEON Emporium](#). Festivities include live painting and music, a retro video game arcade, WHRO’s Emerging Leaders Bob Ross Appreciation Station, and all the zines you can handle from Norfolk Zine Fest. Post fest, Rasputin said the venue will hopefully continue to serve as a special events space for the district.

If you go:

What: NEON Festival

When: Thursday and Friday nights

Where: Norfolk's NEON District

Tickets: Free. More information and a full schedule can be found at

NeonNFK.com/festival.

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Topics: neon district, neon festival, charles rasputin, art, live art, painting, music beer garden
