

Music Fest Highlights Big Plans for Area- August 9, 2007

For years the only people who took full advantage of the open space and fresh air provided by Lincoln Park were the residents of the integrity house, a drug treatment center.

“It was an underutilized space,” Baye-Adofo Wilson said.

Wilson is the executive director of the Lincoln Park coast cultural district, a nonprofit arts and cultural community development corporation. Last year the agency held its first music festival at the park, which brought new faces and fresh sounds, including afro-punk.

This year the second annual Lincoln Park music festival opened on July 26 at the city without walls arts gallery on Crawford Street, with the jazz by Cecil Brooks III and his CBIII band, featuring Miki Howard. On July 27, worshippers came by car, bus, and foot for an evening of gospel music featuring Richard Smallwood and Vision and JC Thomson & Beyond Blessed.

The following afternoon, the festival stretched its arms around the park itself with the house music as the backdrop, and welcomed people from Newark and beyond. “

“We came all the way from Willingboro to see this” Shikil Mathis said.

Mathis is a Newark native who spent evenings at the Zanzibar, Sterling Club 88 and other haunts where the music was bass-heavy and up-tempo. In 1994, she and her husband, Andre, left Newark to make their way in the world. For the past three years they have lived in Willingboro in Burlington County.

“Definitely in the house music,” she said. Caught up in rhythms that pre-date their marriage, Andre Mathis danced a few steps while watching the people who gathered on the dance floor in front of the soundstage. On that stage another Newark Native participated in a personal homecoming.

“I’m not accustomed to performing here in Newark,” Stephanie Cooke said. “But it’s great to be here, where I was born and raised”.

Cooke’s performance pulled more revelers onto the dance floor, and by the final notes of “love will always find a way,” the party was in full swing.

Grills, skillets and coolers filled with fish, chicken, strip, collard greens, sweet potatoes, iced tea and lemonade from local eateries provide the fuel for all the dancing and singing.

Artisans applied colors and images to garbage cans that will be used throughout the district, while Newark’s youngsters took their first cracks at running a skateboard up a ramp. The festival also had room for deejays, jewelers, designers and authors to sell their goods. “We need to look at our own images, especially for our children, to show that we can be detectives, doctors, superheroes,” Kenneth Miles said.

Miles co-owns a publishing company, which set up a display table just north of the soundstage, featuring stories about brainy brown, a world-traveling detective. The city set up the super summer

table next to miles and next to Newark's table was the Lincoln park coast cultural district table, filled with brochures explaining the corporation's long-term ambitions.

The LPCCD also wants people to think of Lincoln Park as the place to live. Its mission is to establish a 300 "green" housing unit, a mixture of single family homes, lofts, condominiums and rentals in the small area bordered by broad street to the east, Lincoln Park to the south, Washington Street to the West and West Kinney Street to the north.

Of the 300 units planned, LPCCD is to develop more than 20 of them, with outside developers finishing the rest. Two-thirds are designed for ownership.

"They will range from \$60,000 to \$ 600,000," Wilson said.

Bamboo flooring, cabinets with wheat boarding, low volatility organic chemical paint, garden rooftops and basins to catch rainwater that will be used to nourish the rooftops during the dog days of summer and will contribute to turning the neighborhood green.

Initial construction is visible on Washington Street, where six two unit town houses will stand, and on Crawford street, which will offer loft-style condominiums thirteen more units are under permit for construction, and by the end of the year the corporation hopes to begin construction seven townhouses and 15 condominiums,

"I'm thinking about relocating," Linda Street said.

Street currently lives in Montclair and attended the festival to enjoy the sounds and promote over the edge, a fashion boutique in Montclair.

"This was a big empty park three days ago," she said. "Hopefully they can keep it ongoing."

By 2010 the corporation wants to have all its projects completed including the Smithsonian-affiliated museum of African-American music. Planned for the space currently occupied by the symphony hall box office and the building next to it, the museum will include a children's music gallery, a music cafe, a performance gallery and exhibitions on gospel, blues, jazz, R & B, rock N roll, and Hip hop

The hip hop exhibit may include rand Master Melle Mel who, for one day July 29, declared himself a resident of Brick Cit during the 30th Anniversary celebration of the Rock Steady Crew, a collective of dancers, emcees, deejays, producers and graffiti artists.

Sharing the stag with Melle Mel were B-Boys and B- Girls from rock steady crew along with hip hop legends Biz Markie, the soul sonic force, Danna Dane, Chubb Rock, who left an impromptu memorial for Shabbs Ranks, Just-ice and Naughty by Nature

"I'm here to hear my music" Keith Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez is a 31-year old who brought along his son, who sat on his father's shoulder and enjoyed the show. Rodriguez thinks most contemporary rap music lacks the lyrical content and creativity displayed by the acts that graced the stage at the festival. And while he recognizes his son will develop musical tastes of his own. Rodriguez will offer some of what he thinks is quality music.

“Some KRS- One and some Punisher, “ he said.

Audience members came prepared for the early afternoon rains, with enough umbrellas to keep everyone close to the stage relatively dry. The sun cracked through the sky during Biz Markie’s performance and the skies remained dry for the remainder of the concert

“Seeing those cats perform was the best, “Kyle Sellers Said. “ Especially since I didn’t get a chance to see them back in the day.”

Sellers, 32, who lives in Orange grew up listening to hip hop and appreciates the prose and practice of the artists who took turns on the stage.

“That was better than any summer Jam I’ve ever been to, “ he said

The executive director eventually broke down and enjoyed the show too,

“By the time Naughty by Nature came out I was in the back with Keith Murray, and I just said “I’m not working anymore,” Wilson said.

That spirit lasted until the following day, when Wilson and smith discussed the future. They hope to include a full day of jazz next year and they also hope that the festival will someday grow into a weeklong event.

“We want to connect it with other place and venues in the city that offers different types of music” smith said.

For more information on the festival and Lincoln Park coast Cultural District, call (973) 242- 4144 or visit www.lpccd.org.