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A BIG BOON

Cashing in on concerts

McLevy Green series benefits downtown restaurants

By Keila Torres Ocasio

BRIDGEPORT — The city's weekly concert series ended with a group of cover bands on Thursday, putting an end to a summer full of music, dancing, socializing and, perhaps most importantly, of dining at local restaurants.

The outdoor "Downtown Thursdays" shows, which began in mid-June, were kicked off in 2010 and have increasingly grown in popularity.

The series is organized by the city and the Downtown Special Services District.

People from across the region and state have traveled downtown to enjoy the free concerts, said Brett Broesder, a spokesman for Mayor Bill Finch.

"It provides people from across the city with an opportunity to further enjoy our up-and-coming downtown," he said.

And as more people visit McLevy Green to enjoy the reggae, indie rock, funk/soul, old school hip hop and Latin music, they've also been taking the time to explore the downtown's dining options.

"Business increased. It brought a different crowd of people here that don't usually come here," said Jimmy McDermott, general manager of Bistro B, which has a sister restaurant, Barnum Publick House, two doors down on Broad Street.

Other events held downtown throughout the year don't necessarily mean business will increase, but that hasn't been the case with the concert series.

"The Thursdays have been pretty good for us," McDermott said.

Joe Tiago, owner of Tiago's restaurant, which sits directly across the street from the green, has also benefited from the summer series.

"Downtown Thursdays was great," he said. "It's a great event they do, yearly. The acts really drew a lot of people to come downtown and it helped out our business significantly."

Massimo Tabaco, owner of Amici Miei on Main Street, estimated his customer base grew as much as 40 percent on the days bands were playing.

"Some days are better than others depending on the band and the crowd," he said.

He said "Downtown Thursdays" appears to be more popular each year, meaning bigger dining crowds each year as well. "It's creating traffic, so we're all for it," he said.

Ending the series Thursday were cover bands Soul Synergy, That 80's Band and Superhero.

Waiting for the bands to start on Thursday was Susan Coda-Washington, of Milford. She said she has visited the Barnum Publick House and Tiago's on past trips to the concert series. "But I haven't really walked around," she said.

Diego Galvis, a recent city resident, said he's been to every one of this year's concerts. And afterward he always visits El Pueblito restaurant on Wall Street. "Every Thursday I eat there," he said.

Hanging out on the green, Lenny Hunter, John Cummings and Larry Hunter said they don't only visit one location, but try to spread the love around.

"We walk around, me and my grandkids," said Lenny Hunter.

His older brother, Larry, said he enjoys coming downtown every Thursday. "A lot of people come down here that I know," he said, adding that he enjoys having a safe, fun place to go on summer nights. Broesder said planning has already begun for next year's concert series.

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