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## Several familiar attractions and some new ones at this year's Communitersity

April 24, 2012

By Bonnie Schultz, for NewsWorks

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A scene from last year's Communitersity in Princeton. Organizers of the festival say attendance reached 40,000 in 2011. (Photo courtesy of the Arts Council of Princeton)

This weekend, Princeton will celebrate Communitersity, the largest community arts festival in the central New Jersey region.

Considered to be one of the most welcome signs of spring, thousands of people are expected to attend this

This grassroots marketing effort has led to the growth of the event through the years because we don't rely on traditional advertising.

-- Jeff Nathanson, director of the

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year's event, which will offer several familiar attractions and some new ones.

Highlights this year

A major highlight of this year's Communiunity is the Continuum mural that will be painted on the side of the building that houses the Terra Momo Bread Company by artist Illia Barger.

When asked about the mural, Raoul Momo, co-owner of Terra Momo Restaurant Group, said "the Arts Council approached us about the mural last year, and we were definitely in favor of it because it was a way to remember the wonderful parks (on the site) that is now the Hulfish North development."

Both the mural and the exhibit celebrate three past well-known collaborative public art installations: Herban Garden, Writers Block and Quark Park. The Terra Momo Restaurant Group planted the Herban Garden, which was designed by Peter Soderman, mainly to be the produce garden for its restaurants. The garden, which included nine-foot tall corn stalks and giant sunflowers, eventually inspired two other sculpture gardens: Writers Block, which celebrated chosen authors through follies that imagined where they would write, and Quark Park, which celebrated science through art installations.

Barger is painting highlights from the exhibitions such as Leslie Dowling's copper cone homage to Pablo Neruda from Writer's Block and Shirley Tighlman's synapse sculpture of a rat's eye from Quark Park within bubbles that float up to the sky, or the infinite continuum of creativity.

"There's a great quote from Peter Soderman, the bohemian gardener, who says "all culture comes from agriculture." It's true in this particular case...they planted a seed, made a garden and look at all the culture that sprang from it," said Barger. The garden installations were dearly loved by many area residents.

Communiunity attendees will get to see Barger in action as she will be painting the mural during the event. They will also be able to pose for photos that will appear in a facsimile of the mural in the Commemorative Exhibition, which will be running in conjunction with the project in the Arts Council gallery.

The Commemorative Exhibition opens on April 28th and runs until June 9th.

The Arts Council has encouraged participating organizations, businesses, artists and performers to take an active role in promoting Communiunity.

"This grassroots marketing effort has led to the growth of the event through the years because we don't rely on traditional advertising," said Jeff Nathanson, Arts Council director. "It's been a community effort that has enabled the (festival's) success."

As a result of this word-of-mouth marketing effort, attendance has grown exponentially since the festival's early days.

Growing attendance numbers

In 2005, 15,000 people attended Communiunity. In 2006, Nathanson became Director of the Arts Council and felt that the event had moved too far away from its roots in the arts and had become more of a street fair. Communiunity was reinvented yet again as Communiunity Festival of the Arts.

In 2007, Communiunity expanded its geographic area by adding a stage in Palmer Square that, according to Nathanson, "allowed us to include more artists and performers and 'grow' the event."

The event has since seen steady growth in attendance numbers, reaching 40,000 in 2011.

The success of Communiunity has inspired a Princeton Arts Weekend. Starting April 27th, the Friday night before Communiunity and running throughout the weekend, organizations in the Princeton area will join the Arts Council by having events on their calendar. McCarter Theater, the Princeton Public Library, and the Princeton Art Museum are just a few of the organizations that will be sponsoring special events.

The festival's live music is one of its highlights. Bands such as The Holy Goats, Sensemaya Afrobeat All-Stars, Stolen Rhodes, and The Blue Meanies Tribute Band are just a few of the many bands that will be playing.

The festival also offers several events aimed towards children, including "Nana's Make a Mess Workshop," created in the memory of Julienne Sylvia Winarsky.

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Arts Council



An exhibit inspired by Andy Warhol at last year's Communiunity. (Photo courtesy of the Arts Council of Princeton)

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