

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Old Town shoots for 'destination' status

By Paul Burgarino

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Known for its signature Seafood Festival, Pittsburg has expanded its events calendar this summer with the hope of reeling in visitors to Pittsburg's downtown, or Old Town Pittsburg.

City recreation officials say they hope to hold 90 to 120 events in Old Town this year, mostly in the summer. Starting Thursday, there will rarely be a day without an event in Old Town, said Timi Tumbaga, coordinator for Old Town Pittsburg.

"May is when things get crazy because the bulk of our events start happening," she said.

The events rev up Thursday night with the annual Classic Car Show, with hot rods and classic cars on display on Railroad Avenue. The event, now in its sixth year, features theme nights that coincide with the live music, Tumbaga said. It is held every Thursday night through September.

Sue Siino, an organizer for the event, said it started as a way to show off local spruced-up cars. In past years, people have come from around the Bay Area and Sacramento to the event.

"It's a lot of fun to see people from all over come out with their cars," she said, adding that the cars start rumbling into downtown in the early afternoon.

Pittsburg's car show is different because it's family-oriented, Recreation Director Paul Flores said. "It's a great mix of people having a good time," he said.

The other weekly event is the farmers market, which generally picks up in the summer months because of nicer weather, Recreation Supervisor Ken Gray said. The event, which will start its fourth year this month, is held year-round Saturday mornings.

Other May events include the second year of Art di Strada, a wine and art stroll that features displays along with East County artisans working on paintings of either a downtown scene or photograph and art displays from artists around the Bay Area. New this year is a 20-by-6 foot mural, which the public is encouraged to paint.

"It's like a great big coloring book but with paint," said Rose Mary Tumbaga, the city's art coordinator.

The design is already stenciled, she said.

New events for the rest of the summer include pasta and eggplant cooking challenges and the first Classic Saturday, which features classical music on the city's new marina promenade. The city also will be holding events to celebrate different cultures in Pittsburg throughout the summer.

On June 7-8, the Black Diamond Blues Festival will be held in Old Town, and the Seafood Festival is slated for Sept. 5-7.

During the summer, the backdrop of Old Town will be changing as well, as new restaurants, housing and streetscapes start to be completed. The first phase of the Vidrio mixed-use project, restaurants La Veranda Bar and Grill and EJ Phair Brewing Co. and Alehouse, renovation of the Liberty Hotel and improvements of Railroad Avenue are expected to be completed by the end of the summer.

"It's a wonderful thing. Pittsburg is going to be another happening town in Contra Costa County," said Nicolas Maamari, owner of La Veranda, which is scheduled to open May 28.

"It adds another level of excitement. Visitors get to see the progress, the new restaurants coming in and envision the future," Tumbaga said.

Pittsburg's goal is to make Old Town "a destination place," said Brad Nail, the city's economic development director.

Said Tumbaga, "It's the third place. It's not where you live or work, but where you want to spend your spare time."

For more information about Old Town Pittsburg events, call 925-473-0700.

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