

Friday Cheers 2009: More to Cheer About

by Barry Napier

Heading into its 17th year of festivities, Friday Cheers 2009 is offering far more to cheer about. Full of changes, surprises and unique features, the event is now bigger and better than ever!

With so many people cutting back on traveling, the “staycation” is becoming more and more popular. Realizing this, Friday Cheers has gone above and beyond to bring fun and entertainment to Lynchburg this summer. These popular events are a great way to kick off the weekend and gives community members something different to do in their own backyard.

To liven up the festivities, Friday Cheers has undergone several changes for this 2009 season. One small difference this year is that there is only one location.

Traditionally, Friday Cheers has alternated between Riverside and the Downtown Community Market. This year, due to construction on Jefferson Street, all 12 Friday Cheers are being held at the Community Market. For those of you who enjoyed the variety in the changing locations, don't fret—there are plenty of other improvements to compensate!

Over the past year, the folks at Lynch's Landing have incorporated local feedback into the plans surrounding the production of Friday Cheers. Acting on popular demand, Friday Cheers now offers a wider variety of vendors and musical acts. While local favorites like The Worx and The House Band will still be present, this year's gatherings are also filled with several different bands, some coming from as far away as Washington

DC, Tennessee and Georgia. The goal is to cover a wide range of musical tastes from country to funk. Some rather popular names will also be gracing the Community Market this year. To name a few, Randy Houser, The Carter Twins and “The Biggest Loser’s” Dan Evans are all scheduled to appear.

One of the biggest changes this year is the use of social media tools to promote the events. Friday Cheers has taken the web by storm and is now present on MySpace, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter, in addition to its traditional spots on TV and radio. A live webcam will also be broadcasting Friday Cheers events online and the events will be available to watch on YouTube. With more people getting their news and local events calendars online rather than through traditional media, these web-based social tools are a much-needed step in the growth of Friday Cheers.

“We wanted to use all of these popular social media tools to help get the word out about Friday Cheers,” said Christopher McCune, Lynch’s Landing Events Manager. “Friday Cheers was never meant to be just something that people did on a Friday afternoon. We wanted it to be this big event—almost like a festival—every single Friday. With some of the changes we have coming this summer, I think we have a good chance of creating that sort of atmosphere.”

In recent years, Friday Cheers has typically drawn crowds ranging between 2,700 to 4,000 people. This number is usually a reflection of the band that is scheduled to appear. While these numbers are impressive, the new changes to the event are sure to draw more people out on Friday afternoons from May to August. One convenient new option: the public can now pre-purchase tickets online. For the bigger acts that are scheduled to appear this year, this promises to be a very helpful option.

Another new feature that has everyone talking is “Lynchburg Star.” This event is designed to be a singing competition that will search for the Lynchburg resident with the best vocals and stage performance. For the first 11 Friday Cheers of the season, a panel of three judges, including *Lynchburg Living’s* Editor, Johanna Calfee, is responsible for choosing a single winner from each night’s pool of contestants. On the 12th and final Cheers of the season, those 11 finalists will serve as an opening act for that night’s band. The judges will then crown one contestant as the “Lynchburg Star.” The winner of the contest will be featured in our very own *Lynchburg Living*. He or she will also receive an autographed photo and lyrics sheet from country star and Lynchburg native, Phil Vassar. There is also talk about a possible free demo session with a local recording studio. Anyone interested in participating in Lynchburg Star needs to pre-register for the contest. Contact Lynch’s Landing for details.

With all of these exciting changes, as well as a larger selection of food and beverage vendors, 2009 is already proving to be the most eventful Friday Cheers ever. Still, in the midst of all of these modifications, most of the basics will remain the same. For instance, all Cheers will be held on Friday afternoons between 5:30 – 9:00 p.m. and will require a \$5 cover charge for admission. All proceeds from Friday Cheers go towards the downtown revitalization efforts. So come on down and join the crowd. It will soon have you asking, “Is it Friday yet?”

OH SNAP! For the upcoming July/August issue, send us your best shot of “Friday Cheers” and we will pick one to publish. Please submit shots taken in our area and limit submissions to five per person. The deadline is June 8th. Email your photo to feedback@lynchburgliving.com.