



INSIDE THE ISSUES SHAPING OUR COMMUNITY

Villagers Love Shows; Entertainers Want In

TRACK RECORD ATTRACTS INTEREST FROM BIGGER NAMES



Michael Johnson | Daily Sun

Rock legend George Thorogood finishes the song “Who Do You Love” to the applause of the crowd during his band’s Rock Party tour at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.



Michael Johnson | Daily Sun

Comedian Howie Mandel performs for the sold-out crowd at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.



Hannah Ridings | Daily Sun

Judy Collins performs a live concert at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

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By KRISTEN FIORE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

During the 2018-19 entertainment season, big-name acts such as KC and the Sunshine Band, the Village People, Broadway’s “Chicago” and more stopped in The Villages. The Villages Entertainment saw a 10% increase in ticket sales, a huge jump in the live entertainment world. After a 100% sellout of Season 1 and 2 at the Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol, more seats were added to each performance, and ticket sales have increased steadily by more than a thousand each year. “What this tells us is that ultimately we are bringing in more shows that our residents really want to see,” said Brian Russo, director of entertainment.

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ENTERTAINMENT

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There also are more shows being brought into Florida's Friendliest Hometown.

In 2018, the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center hosted 115 performances, and by December 2019, it will have brought in 122 for the year, according to Elizabeth Constant, booking coordinator at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

"I have found that it's easier to get my phone calls answered by artist's agents now that we have some history behind us and have hosted certain big-name acts," Constant said. "In the beginning, I did most of the calling to find artists. Now my phone won't stop ringing. It's nice to have data behind us that shows that we are a premiere performing arts facility in Central Florida."

Russo said they've been working to book bigger names that will give high-quality performances.

"I've noticed a swing in what people are interested in seeing," Russo said. "There seems to be a much wider range of what works here, and I attribute all of that to the large growth we've had and are continuing to have. The Villages is an incredible place and draws so many people from different backgrounds,

interests and professions. This has impacted what we book and when we do it."

In addition to upping the number and quality of the acts brought in, The Villages Entertainment also spent the season making internal upgrades.

Savannah Center started off the 2018-19 season with a brand new sound and lights system, equipped with colorful moving lights and better sound quality.

At The Sharon, the international subscription was added for patrons who enjoy seeing international acts.

"I think the patrons who signed up for this subscription opportunity really made the most of it," Constant said. "It was so rewarding chatting with patrons after the show who have been to Spain, Japan, Australia and more, and loved the acts that traveled so far to perform for The Villages."

Constant said that 162 packages and a total of 788 tickets

in subscriptions were sold. She anticipates the international subscription, which gives patrons 20% off international show tickets and a beverage at the show inspired by that night's country, to be even more popular in the 2019-20 season.

In addition to the international subscription, two more subscriptions have been added for the 2019-20 season, a Broadway Subscription and National Geographic Subscription.

Broadway subscribers can package the three Broadway shows coming to The Sharon, "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical," "The Play That Goes Wrong" and "Bandstand."

National Geographic subscribers have the opportunity to package a speaker series with shows on a variety of topics, including travel, underwater photography and the Spinosaurus, the largest predatory dinosaur ever discovered.

Meanwhile, The Villages' first play festival, "Scripts from Scratch," was hosted at the Studio Theatre. Florida playwrights submitted scripts. Four scripts were selected for the workshop, which allowed the writers to spend a week with a professional director and group of actors to rehearse, tweak and revise their scripts before seeing them performed in front of a live audience.

"Those who subscribed to all four shows would have dinner and discuss the play between shows and come back and speak up at the short post-show talk backs," Constant said. "It was nice to see familiar faces after each reading."

Constant said she plans to adjust the festival and bring it back in 2021.

On the squares, Market Night was revamped to add new vendors and a day at Brownwood. Since September, Market Night has been every Tuesday at Spanish Springs,

every Wednesday at Lake Sumter Landing and every Thursday at Brownwood.

And recently, the Villages Box Office made upgrades to its online ticketing system to make buying tickets online more efficient and interactive and added a remote call center that expanded box office operating hours by an additional 18 hours a week.

"We've seen about a 5% jump (in online ticket patrons) in the last year alone," Russo said. "The convenience is very appealing."

Constant said that the recent announcements of new developments in The Villages has opened a whole new future for entertainment.

"With more people, there are more opportunities to serve their needs and interests," Constant said. "I look forward to bringing in acts for folks in the new housing down south. I can't wait to host them at The Sharon!"

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