

FNL Possible Because of Volunteers

Written by Leslie Perales • Observer Editor
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Music lovers from both inside and outside Herndon are gearing up for another summer of Friday Night Live, but the event series rests largely on the shoulders of its volunteer staffers.

Event founder Doug Downer said volunteers are tasked with everything from helping set up and clean up, to checking bags as people enter, to pouring beer and wine. “The greatest thing to me is the volunteers,” he said.

Downer said most every Friday night during the summer he can be found within the gates of the event but one evening last summer he was coming home from a trip when Friday Night Live was already in full swing.

It was the first time Downer had seen the spaces outside of Friday Night Live while it was going on. He said he was impressed to see not only how many people the event drew out into downtown, both on the Town Green and outside it, but also how smoothly the event ran with the volunteers at the helm.

“Once Friday gets here I don’t have anything to do anymore,” Downer said. He said he gets to sit back and keep an eye on things, make sure big issues are taken care of and provide updates on the weather status. “Everybody has ownership,” he said of the volunteers.

Downer said the credit for the event’s success truly goes to those who help ensure it’s a fun, safe event every week all summer long. He said while one volunteer has been helping since the inaugural summer, a number of them have been working the event for more than a decade of its 16 years.

Many of the volunteers put so much into making the event happen and donating a large portion of much of their time, Downer said. He said he knows it is a fun event and many people think it’s cool to attend but he is still surprised to find that some volunteers offer to work a double shift nearly every Friday all summer.

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In the off-season the volunteers still can't get enough of the Friday Night Live atmosphere, Downer said. He said a large group of the volunteers meet about once a month through the winter at The Breeze in downtown Herndon to have a family dinner.

"Nobody is volunteering at Friday Night Live for anything but community," Downer said. He said they enjoy the fun, camaraderie and satisfaction of helping put on an event that the entire community can safely enjoy.

Downer said for him the most enjoyment from the event comes from the team of volunteers and from being able to use the event to give back to the community. Over the years Friday Night Live has raised more than \$208,000 and put it right back into the community, he said.

Each year FNL provides a \$5,000 contribution to Herndon High School for its after-prom and all night grad parties to help high school students safe, fun, alcohol-free evenings after big events. FNL has donated a total of \$67,000 to the programs.

The event has also helped raise about \$67,000 for the Herndon Optimist youth sports clubs, helped the Herndon Elementary School PTA raise funds for the school through glow necklace sales and helped the Herndon High School sports boosters raise funds by selling popcorn.

Downer said in the future, while the event works well and will likely not change much, he hopes to get community members involved in the event. "We need to get more young people involved on the volunteer side," he said. FNL kicks off with 2U Friday at 6:30 p.m. on the Town Green behind the Municipal Center.