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New Founders Festival event to promote Main Street

It's important to get the name straight for the new Farmington Founders Festival event, held downtown July 15-18.

Described in materials for the June 7 Farmington City Council meeting as "the wine tent," the benefit was renamed "Grapes on the Grand" after Downtown Development Authority funding was secured the next day.

Founders Festival Executive Director Kristine Franko said the name change is important, just as Founder's Cafe has been used to identify an annual venue located behind Page's Food and Spirits on Farmington Road, where alcohol is served in the evening hours.

Franko said Grapes on the Grand won't be located near youth activities. She added, "For this to work, we must have the most visibility possible."

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The fund-raiser and wine tasting event, which spans all three festival days, is the brainchild of Greg Cowley, owner of John Cowley & Sons, on Grand River, east of Farmington Road.

Franko said the city-owned Warner Mansion site was the first choice, but they weren't able to secure the necessary waiver from First Church of Christ, Scientist. By law, the venue could not be located within 500 feet of a church.

Placing several tents on city-owned Liberty Park, located at the southwest corner of Oakland and Grand River, wouldn't have allowed for much overflow. More importantly, DDA funds couldn't be secured for the event because the park is located outside of the DDA district.

The Downtown Farmington Center parking lot, the hub for festival activities, was the final choice because it can accommodate a larger crowd and would be most beneficial to downtown Farmington merchants.

Franko admits she was surprised to learn about the final location about two hours before she spoke to the council Monday night.

At first, she mentioned Grapes on the Grand might be located near the teen tent in the western portion of the parking lot. Farmington Councilman Jim Mitchell pointed out the location must be sensitive to impressionable youth.

As of Thursday, Franko said the exact location in the center wasn't finalized; several sites are under consideration.

Councilwoman JoAnne McShane wanted to know how the tent would be monitored and how children would be kept out.

"The folks who run our business on the weekends will provide staffing for the whole weekend," Cowley said. "It will be closed off. There will only be access through one area. They will be ID'd."

Specific vendors have offered to come in and sponsor a wine tasting, provided in consumption in small events, along with education about what the wine is and where it comes from, Cowley said.

He wants low-key, upscale entertainment all three nights with acoustic music. "It would provide a different offering for people who come to the festival," Cowley said.

The tent would be used during the day for displays and information about the Main Street program. The city is midway in the Oakland Main Street program, a secured grant which offers technical assistance but no money. The downtown plan features new streets, a community pavilion and a parking structure.

Open to the public all three days, Grapes on the Grand would include a \$30 per ticket Gala dinner and fundraiser on Thursday, with wine tasting Friday and Saturday.

On Tuesday morning, the DDA approved Cowley's request for a sponsorship.

"Hopefully we will put \$4,500 in the Main Street pocket rather than take out," Cowley said.

The donation is split; \$2,500 underwrites Grapes on the Grand, \$2,000 represents the DDA's annual festival sponsorship.

"I do have a fair amount of suppliers who are interested, both participating, sponsoring or adding

their name to it or bringing their wines in for display or sale at a discount," Cowley said.

Total budget is about \$15,000, with food provided each night and an estimated 300 bottles of wine consumed over the three-day period, Cowley said. As of Friday, \$6,000 had been raised. Both Franko and Cowley are still seeking sponsorships to cover the cost.

Proceeds from all three days will first pay whatever costs aren't covered by sponsorships. Profits will be split 50_50 between Main Street and the Festival, Cowley said.

"The Promotions Committee is very interested in seeing this happen at the festival," said Dirk Beamer, a DDA board member. "Our priority is to have a venue where we can locate the master plan to promote what they are."

DDA Director Brent Morgan wants to see copies of the master plan enlarged for display and in different locations in the district.

Additionally, Cowley hopes to have an interactive display up during the day geared toward children, who would be invited to draw their ideal picture of what downtown Farmington should look like.

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