

An alternative arts festival for everyone



Allentown ArtsFest runs Sept. 12-14 in Cedar Beach Park. (CHRISTIAN WEBER, CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

By **Tim Higgins,**
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Dig out that Keith Haring T-shirt, slip on your Vans and get on over to Cedar Beach this weekend for the new Allentown ArtsFest, which aims to mix skateboarding culture and street art with every other kind of art in a family-friendly atmosphere.

The fest is the brainchild of Brandon Wunder, the 29-year-old director of the Alternative Gallery in Allentown, which, in the past two years has become an outlet for diverse local artists, musicians and writers.

Wunder thinks big, and three months ago when he and his colleagues dreamed up an arts festival, they knew it had to combine the same underground cultural elements represented in the gallery.

So the Alternative Gallery teamed up with Bethlehem's Homebase apparel and skate gear shop to create the free event, which runs Friday through Sunday Sept. 12-14 along the Hamilton Boulevard side of Lake Muhlenberg at Cedar Beach in Allentown.

It's the same weekend as festivities surrounding the opening of the PPL Center in downtown Allentown, and the city is looping the fest into its promotion. "The city is very supportive of what we're doing," says Wunder.

ArtsFest has an impressive lineup of artists, events and vendors and, Wunder says, it is meant to be an extension of what the Alternative Gallery is all about. Along with artists, there will be break dancing and skateboard demonstrations, comedy, kids' activities and performances by local bands playing everything from blues, hard

rock, hip-hop, avant-garde, folk and more.

"My goal is to help artists sustain themselves through their art," says Wunder, which is one of the reasons he co-founded the Alternative Gallery, a combination exhibit space and store in the Cigar Factory at 707 N. Fourth St. The gallery has an eclectic mix of pop art, conceptual installation and outsider art.

"I wanted what we do at the gallery to be bigger, louder and longer," says Wunder.

The festival, in turn, will be a bigger and louder alternative to many local arts festivals.

A skate park will be created at Cedar Beach, and Homebase will host performances and demonstrations. Lost Soul Skateboards and Adam Sander will have hand-pressed custom skateboards for sale. On Sunday, a tiered skating competition will be featured.

The festival will feature more than 100 artists, vendors, local organizations, small businesses and nonprofits. Wunder says the focus is on visual art, with 30 art vendors, dozens of artists demonstrating and 15 graffiti artists creating works live. Among the graffiti artists is the legendary 5 Pointz of New York City. Wunder says after the festival, their panels will be installed in communities and business around Allentown.

The Mad Road Artists, a group that includes Troy Heiland and Chris Jones, will work on four paintings accompanied and inspired by live music at 7 p.m. Friday. An installment of the ongoing "Lehigh Valley Art Wars" live art competition will be at 2 p.m. Sunday.

Upcycling — using old and discarded materials and turning them into something different — will be prominent. Wunder says there will be sculptures made of discarded metal scraps and reconstructed yarnbombing featuring pieces created at this year's Musikfest customized to fit Cedar Beach. A junk car will be turned into a large painting.

But the festival will cover much more than visual arts.

On two stages will be a host of bands and other performers.

Local improv comedy group 4 AM In Thailand will perform at 12:30 p.m. Sunday on the main stage and offer free improv classes after the show. Other stand-up comedians will perform, some of whom participate in the Alternative Gallery's weekly open mic called Social Medium.

The "Tape Swap Radio Stage" will feature acoustic musicians, some theater and improv.

About two dozen bands and musicians will perform throughout the weekend. Bands on the main stage include roots rock reggae band Trouble City All Stars at 7 p.m. Friday, psychedelic blues band KEG at 6:45 p.m. Saturday and gypsy folk band This Way to Egress at 4 p.m. Sunday.

Also performing Saturday on the main stage is the Nitschmann Step Team.

For kids, an "Alternative Clubhouse" will feature classes, games and activities, including the "Kit Rex" create-your-own dinosaur costume project.

Six local breweries will be on hand, including Brew Works, HiJinx, Saucony Creek, The Other Farm, Sly Fox and Funk. About 30 food vendors include Batuque, a Brazilian restaurant based in Easton; Frites Fries; Big Daddy's BBQ; The Taza Truck; Zuzu Confections; Coffee Joint and Apple Frankies, which sells smoothies, funnel cake and freshly squeezed lemonade.

Tim Higgins is a freelance writer.

Jodi Duckett, editor

jodi.duckett@mcall.com

610-820-6704

ALLENTOWN ARTS FEST

•**When:** noon-8 p.m. Sept. 12 and 13; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 14

•**Where:** Cedar Beach, 2600 Parkway Boulevard, Allentown

•**How much:** Free

•**Info:** allentownartsfest.com

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