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NEWS > LOCAL NEWS > ARLINGTON Tuesday, Feb 26, 2008

Arlington

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For just a few dollars more, pavilion will be a done deal

BY O.K. CARTER
 STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

If you haven't been keeping score on the Friends of the Levitt Pavilion's fundraising for their share of the Founders' Plaza Park across from City Hall, here's the tally: \$1,113,350 in the bank, \$86,650 to go.

The problem is that time's up. Or close to it. The critical element for Founders Park is the Levitt Pavilion, a state-of-the-art outdoor stage (it has electronic amplification and lighting) that could only be described as a band shell if one were prone to extreme simplification. The city will ante up for park improvements, but the friends have to pay for the pavilion.

The stage -- technically it's called the Levitt Pavilion for the Performing Arts -- will host at least 50 professional popular music performances annually to meet the Levitt Foundation's requirement for funding.

Otherwise it can be used for just about anything else, from amateur Shakespeare performances and garage bands to marriage ceremonies and Miss Arlington contests. It's going to bring an enormous amount of activity to downtown while the area is essentially dead. At night.

Though the Levitt concerts have to be by professional performers, 10 or more of those shows will include a new twist.

"We've worked out an arrangement with the Arlington school district to provide a young artists' showcase," notes Kristin Vandergriff, a civic activist, Tarrant County College trustee and chairwoman of the friends group.

Many of the warm-up acts for the professional concerts will be high schoolers, from jazz bands to string quartets, she says.

The snag is that the first professional concert -- a rock/folk band called Trout Fishing In America -- is scheduled for sometime in September. Knock on wood.

"To have the pavilion and the park up and ready by September really means that we needed to start construction yesterday," Vandergriff says.

Make no mistake. Arlington tends to be philanthropy-deficient. That the friends group has managed to raise more than \$1.1 million in only four months qualifies as a near miracle. They're almost there.

The city plans to issue a contract for construction anyway, technically listing the pavilion as the second stage in the construction process, though in fact the park and pavilion will be built almost simultaneously.

"They know we'll come up with the last \$86,650 very quickly," Vandergriff says.

How quickly? Maybe as soon as this week. Worst case, next week.

There are some pledges still out -- the city wants actual cash, not pledges -- and fundraising chairman Cliff Mycoskie, a local landscape architect, continues to make calls every day.

"We're definitely going to make it, but it would be great to put those last few dollars in the bank," Mycoskie says.

Though the Levitt Foundation has helped fund several other outdoor pavilions across the country, all the previous projects involved existing outdoor amphitheatres and were essentially renovations.



Community leaders need \$86,650 more to build a state-of-the-art outdoor stage in downtown Arlington.

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MAP: Levitt Pavilion

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"This is the first totally new pavilion and also the first that's basically the centerpiece for downtown redevelopment," Vandergriff says. "So they're looking Founders' Park with considerably more than the usual interest. In fact the Arlington pavilion will be the Levitt flagship -- the model to emulate."

If you want to help

To contribute to Arlington's Levitt Pavilion project, call 817-303-2800 or go to www.levittpavilionarlington.org.

O.K. Carter's column appears Tuesdays and Thursdays. 817-548-5428
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