

BIZBASH

Miami's Top Spring Festivals Combat Recession and Low Attendance With New Programs

March 6, 2009
Brittany Peitsmeyer

Fresh off the heels of the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival, three of the city's top festivals—the Miami International Film Festival, **Winter Party Festival**, and Carnival Miami—have tapped into new resources, introducing new programs, and targeting new demographics to woo attendees in 2009.

In its 26th year, the Miami International Film Festival—beginning today and running through March 15—plans to attract more than 300 of the industry's top representatives from around the world. "With the recession, you obviously have to prepare for a downturn in attendance," said festival assistant director of programming and events Valeria Sorrentino, who aimed to combat the problem by introducing a new program this year: "Cutting the Edge," a collection of progressive film shorts and art installations that push the envelope.

"Recognizing Miami's strong art following, prospering art districts, and the success of events such as Art Basel Miami Beach, the 'Cutting the Edge' program is an effort to attract a younger demographic as well as art goers and collectors," said Sorrentino. The multi-media collection includes the works of Malcolm McLaren, the former manager of the Sex Pistols, and the personal pornographic diary of photo journalist Antoine D'Agata and will run from March 8 to 14 at the New School of the Art's ArtSeen Gallery in Wynwood.

In addition, the festival placed a major emphasis on social networking as a marketing tool this year, using sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Art Tribes Network—a social network for artists and nonprofit groups.

Michael Bath, special events manager for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, led the team behind last week's Winter Party Festival, which concluded on Monday. "Each year we strive to do something new," he said. "In addition to an expanded women's program, which the planning committee has been working on for a number of years, we also replaced one of our 25 signature events for something different this year."

Instead of the annual runway show Bath organized two shopping events. Winter Party guests (and the general public) drank complimentary Grey Goose cocktails as they shopped for discounted goods at Diesel and Kiehl's, Lincoln Road's two host stores that in turn donated 20 percent of all proceeds back to the festival and local gay and lesbian charities. "The two shopping events packed the stores on Lincoln, directly stimulating the economy," said Bath, who added that he hopes to expand on the shopping events for next year to involve more local business.

This year Bath and his team put the majority of their marketing efforts towards attracting local attendees early in the planning process. "I believe the surge in locals may have made up for a loss of national guests that were left behind as a result of the economy," said Bath.

Also taking place this month is Carnival Miami, comprising nine events (three of which have already taken place), including sports tournaments, a beauty pageant, and multiple concerts. The

festival typically draws close to 1.5 million people throughout its 10 days.

Carnaval's marquee event, the Calle Ocho street festival (scheduled for March 15), will experience the most change this year as it has been compacted to covering 16 blocks, from 11th to 27th Avenues on Miami's SW 8th Street, down from its previous 23. "Calle Ocho will still feature more than 50 acts of entertainment and 300 food vendors," says Sylvia Vieta, head of promotions and media for fest. "By cutting down on the area, we are able to save on everything from permits to security and city services like clean-up."

To combat the smaller finale, event organizers have introduced a five-on-five soccer tournament, which will take place March 11. "The soccer event was our way to further involve the youth, " concludes Vieta.