

Doing the Two-Step on Coal Avenue

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
Friday, 09 July 2021 04:04



Downtown Night Out re-launch draws Gallupians to the streets

Once the Coal Avenue fence came down and the state promised to reopen, Downtown Night Out was ready to make its return to the City of Gallup.

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June 26 was the night. It came with trappings including the Diné Boyz, Austin Ramirez, and the Starlight Dancers.

Organized by Gallup Main Street Arts and Cultural District Executive Director, Kara Smith and Gallup Arts Crawl Executive Director, Rhonda Quintana, of Quintana's Music Center, the event brought out a mix of people — masked and unmasked, in boots and sneakers, bluejeans and cowboy hats — ready to dance the night away, or sit in their chairs and watch.

After more than a year inside waiting out COVID-19 restrictions, residents and visitors were eager to do something new.

The downtown district has been undergoing a facelift for the past year. The Coal Avenue Commons Phase I construction is nearing completion after breaking ground July 20.

"It's been a tough year. COVID-19 and construction meant a fence was up for most of the year. I think things really took a shift once Murphy Builders were (sic) able to get this portion of the road done and take down the fence," Smith said.

Coal Avenue Commons is meant to transform two city blocks into a vibrant plaza. Smith said the partial street reopening on Coal Avenue was an opportunity to host an event, especially since the block was still closed to traffic.

"If you look out there now, it looks like a completely different street," she said.

Smith said there is a lot of excitement about the new street enhancements and what those improvements will do for downtown businesses.

"We want people to come downtown, go to local restaurants and eat. We want them to go to the coffee shop and have a coffee. We want them to pop into the galleries that keep their doors open. [Downtown Night Out] is meant to generate good vibes and little bit of commerce

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downtown,” Smith said.

One of the businesses that supported the effort to revitalize the district is Quintana’s Music Center. Quintana’s has engaged in community events such as Downtown Night Out and Arts Crawl by providing live music.

Like many downtown businesses, the music center hunkered down during the construction of Coal Avenue Commons. This was intensified by the pandemic restrictions.

Quintana said the downtown district has been through some struggles.

“We needed to do something for downtown, so we got the community involved with the Starlight Dancers and Austin Ramirez, who is shipping off to Fort Benning, Ga. for boot camp,” she said.

“This [street] upgrade definitely needed to happen. We transitioned and I don’t think that was our biggest challenge. COVID was our biggest challenge,” she said, adding that Gallup Main Street and the Business Improvement District were both crucial in helping Quintana’s Music survive the pandemic. Quintana said they helped in launching a website and in obtaining small business grants.

However, Quintana said the music center’s biggest support was from loyal customers.

“Our customers from all over the Four Corners came and supported us like you would not believe,” she said. “Through thick and thin, we did curbside, we delivered, and our customers never forgot about us.”

Gallup Arts Crawl is currently in discussions to re-launch that event Quintana told the *Sun*, adding that organizers are interested in positioning it a little more for adults.

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“Thank you to the community for always supporting local businesses, because if it wasn’t for you, I guarantee that we would not be here,” Quintana said. “Thank you from the bottom of our heart[s].”

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