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## University Park event draws art, music downtown

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By Kathleen Folkerth

**DOWNTOWN AKRON** – It's the feel-good vibe of the University Park Art Fair that organizers say keeps bringing people back to the event.

"Almost everybody to a fault says they like to come to the art fair because it's got a great vibe," said Jill Bacon Madden, director of the Aug. 16 event at Grace Park. "Artists like to exhibit there because it feels good, the musicians want to play there because it feels good. It's got a really great energy."

This is the third year for the art fair, which features booths with 100 artists selling their creations such as ceramics, glass, jewelry, painting, photography and more.

Madden said artists hail from the Akron area as well as Cleveland, Columbus and Virginia. About half the artists are new to the fair, she added.

Visitors can do more than view and buy art. They also can get involved in creating some with several opportunities for people of all ages.

For the third year, University of Akron (UA) professor Mark Soppeland will be on hand at the fair. This year he will coordinate two community art projects. The first is a collage and drawing for Haunted Artspace, an installation that will take place at Summit Artspace around Halloween. The other project, Return of the Midnight Sun Family Workshop, is a reprise of Soppeland's 2007 project, in which participants were asked to create fluorescent works that he used at First Night 2008. The artist plans to use this year's works for First Night 2009, Madden said.

In addition, there will be make-and-take craft booths for children conducted by the Akron Art Museum and arts organization City Art Project.

Music again will be a big part of the day. The schedule features Pete Nischt from 10 to 11:45 a.m.; the Ira Jazz Project from noon to 1:45 p.m.; Andy Dolson from 2 to 3:45 p.m.; and Nate X Ten from 4 to 6 p.m.

From 1 to 3 p.m., visitors can bang a drum or shake a tambourine with Don Volenik at his Percussion for All performance.

Radio station WAPS – The Summit will broadcast live from the fair. The station also will collect used musical instruments for its Music Alive program, which provides refurbished instruments for children in Akron Public Schools.

For the second year, food will be provided on site by Virtues restaurant at Akron City Hospital. The restaurant has created a special menu for the fair that includes gourmet pizza, hamburgers and chicken, all priced at \$5 or less.

The University Park Development Corp. (UPDC), a nonprofit that is working toward the renewal and rebirth of the University Park neighborhood, coordinates the University Park Art Fair.

Scott Read, a West Akron resident who is president of the UPDC, said the fair is an important part of the organization's mission.

"It's an opportunity for us to showcase some of the wonderful things the University Park area has going for it," he said. "This is the oldest part of Akron, but people unfortunately don't get to it as much as they should."

The area is a 40-block area bounded by Akron City Hospital, UA and Downtown Akron.

Both Read and Madden hope the fair can continue to expand by offering more artists and attracting more people in the future.

"We're gaining momentum," Madden said. "I had people calling me in February and asking when the art fair is because they wanted to be a part of it."

Parking in the neighborhood of Grace Park is free. Madden said fair-goers also can park at Lock 3 Park and take the city trolley to the fair. The trolley also will stop at Don Drumm Studios and Gallery, which will host its annual sale that weekend.

The University Park Art fair will be held from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. Grace Park is located on Prospect Street between Perkins and East Market streets. For more information, call (330) 374-9470 or go to [www.universityparkartfair.org](http://www.universityparkartfair.org).

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**John Comunale, of Akron, is shown during last year's University Park Art Fair standing by one of his metal works. This year's fair will feature 100 artists.**

Photo: Fred Durr