

Trail Mix concerts will feature 'higher caliber' of artists

BY NICK ULANOWSKI

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Trail Mix Concert Series will return to Izaak Walton this year with a "higher caliber" of artists, according to event organizer Steve Ploum. The lineup includes a Grammy winner and Emmy nominee and an NPR Tiny Desk Concert musician.

Ploum said he hopes Trail Mix can begin attracting concert goers far beyond the Homewood-Flossmoor area and that this will put Homewood on the map for traveling musicians.

The Trail Mix Concert Series switched from a day-long festival at the Izaak Walton Preserve to three performance dates outdoors during the pandemic. Ploum said he plans to stick with that model. He has concerts scheduled for June 10 and Aug. 26 and additional shows will likely extend beyond the summer months with indoor concerts at Izaak Walton in colder months.

"It was horrible (in 2020) to cancel a whole one-day event," said Ploum. "So much work had already been put into it, and you can't just pick up and redo a whole day event at another time. But with a concert series, when you have two or three acts, it's a little easier to do that – should COVID rear its ugly head."

"It's still going to be mostly acoustic – not that we're opposed to an electric guitar," said Ploum. "But it's going to be the type of music that you're going to want to sit down and listen to the lyrics. Or you want to sit down and really listen to the subtleties, the nuance, of the music."

Trail Mix is "turning the page" to the next chapter, Ploum said.

"What I hope happens is that we become on the map for artists that are coming to town. We would love to have this be something that people outside of our area come to. So that people from Chicago, people from Indiana, people

from downstate come visit our town and come visit Izaak Walton," he said.

The 2022 season opens with Grammy winner and Emmy nominated bluegrass and folk musician Dom Flemons as the headliner on June 10 at 7 p.m. Opening the show will be the band Butterfield Creek, led by Ploum.

Flemons' "Genuine Negro Jig" album, with his band Carolina Chocolate Drops, won a Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album in 2010. Flemons' solo album "Black Cowboys" received a Grammy nomination for Best Folk Album in 2019. Flemons also is a two-time Emmy nominee as a performer on the PBS "Songcraft Presents" series and for the song "Good Old Days" which he co-wrote.

"He definitely is a historian as much as he's a master musician and storyteller," Ploum said. "He has definitely understood the history of African American music through the Appalachians and the banjo."

Sunny War, a folk-punk musician from

Los Angeles, will be headlining the concert at 7 p.m. on Aug. 26. War is a popular musician on Spotify, the music streaming service, and she was featured in a 2019 Tiny Desk Concert on NPR.

"She's an amazing guitar player on top of being a singer-songwriter," Ploum said. "She's been compared to Tracy Chapman but with more skills and more invention on the guitar."

Local folk music band the Uh Ohs will open for War.

Ploum said concert goers can purchase "lawn seat" tickets the day of the event at Izaak Walton, but there will be 35 "premium seats" and 60 "general seats" available for pre-order while supplies last. The pre-ordered tickets will be closer to the stage and guarantee a concert goer a seat under the pavilion or in Izaak Walton's Senior Hall if it rains.

Pre-ordered Trail Mix tickets are now available at www.tix.com or on the Trail Mix website at bit.ly/trailmix2022.

Flossmoor OKs seasonal downtown outdoor dining

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A practice that became necessary the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic will be coming back following a request by two downtown restaurants.

The Flossmoor Village Board voted Monday, April 18, to approve an ordinance allowing expanded outdoor service offerings requested by Dunning's Market and the Bistro on Sterling. Village Manager Bridget Wachtel noted that while the ordinance was crafted based on those requests, it is written in such a way to govern any future requests for outdoor dining the village may receive.

"We tried to think ahead to other situations that may arise," Wachtel said.

The village board approved outdoor dining and liquor service the past two years

to support restaurant recovery during the pandemic, according to a report by Assistant Village Manager Jonathan Bogue. The aforementioned restaurants approached the village with a request to continue that service, noting guests have shown further interest in the outdoor spaces.

"The continued use of outdoor dining is a draw to our downtown area," Bogue said. "It might also be a rare, positive side effect of this pandemic."

The approved outdoor service will be similar to what restaurants downtown offered the past two years during warmer months, but with a "smaller footprint" – using fewer parking spaces to do it, according to Bogue. Businesses are still recovering from the challenges of the pandemic, and further allowances for outdoor dining remain important to them, Bogue added.

The approved ordinance allows for outdoor service areas from April 15 to Nov. 1 – the latter an extension from the Oct. 15 end date from the already permitted sidewalk cafes, which also are addressed in the updated text – each year moving forward. It includes allowances for outdoor dining and liquor sales on private and public property, relaxed temporary signage regulations, and relaxed minimum parking regulations, according to Bogue.

"This allows the village to differentiate between outdoor service areas and sidewalk cafes, mostly due to the closeness of the building," Bogue said.

All outdoor service requires administrative approval. And any use of public property will require a license submitted annually with a hold harmless agreement and proof of insurance that has the village listed as an additional insured party. The

full ordinance outlines a variety of conditions for outdoor service and sidewalk cafes, including hours and responsibilities of the businesses.

"I think it's important to note this was a balancing act by staff, trying to meet the needs of our storefront owners that need more space for parking as well as the restaurants who are looking for more space for what has been a really popular thing: outdoor dining," Mayor Michelle Nelson said.

Trustee Gary Daggett said he talked to retail businesses about the proposal and only received positive or neutral feedback on the outdoor dining, despite it taking some parking spaces. Businesses generally think outdoor dining brings more people downtown, which is a benefit, he said.

"We're refining the process every year, which is a great thing," Trustee Brian Driscoll added.

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