

City's cultural calendar is brimming with activity

By **Brenda Durant**

Guest Columnist

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Georgia Health Sciences University President Ricardo Azziz brings up an interesting question about our community ("Augusta lacks 'cool factor' for recruits, Azziz says," June 6).

Many companies are recruiting young professionals to work in Augusta. How do we present our offerings? How do we look to mature professionals coming to town? Do we need to work on our marketing? Are we programming events that invite a wide cross-section of the community to attend?

There are so many answers to these questions. Whenever I am confronted with comments about our community, I like to first ascertain what the accuser knows about our cultural calendar.

ON FIRST REFLECTION, I can't imagine what we are *not* doing in Augusta. Access to information is key. The Greater Augusta Arts Council coordinates a complete cultural calendar. We have an August intern dedicated to making sure that every event we know about is entered on the calendar, with phone numbers to call for information.

Two years ago Perry Broadcasting donated a weekly radio show dedicated to Augusta arts. Every week, I do a variety of events happening that weekend, I interview an artist or person who "works hard but plays easy," then talk about upcoming events. *Arts Weekly* airs Saturday mornings at 9:30 a.m. on 92.3. You also can listen to the podcast on our website, or subscribe on iTunes or Zune. The calendar passed our calendar as the most popular download on our website.

Quick -- name three places you can watch indie or foreign films. Can you? I can:

- The ASU Film Series runs the entire school year.
- The Morris Museum of Art programmed the Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers, with the filmmaker at every screening, available to introduce the film and answer questions at the screening.
- The Augusta Library is producing a foreign film series this summer.

In addition, Augusta Amusements screens movies with a bonus, a musical performance or a special guest. We usually get to walk the red carpet on arrival -- loads of campy fun.

Columbia County and the city of Augusta screen outdoor, family-type movies during the summer.

WHAT ELSE? OUTDOOR concerts perhaps. In the past few weeks I spent a day at the Blues Festival in Thomson, two days at the Banjo-B-Que in North Augusta, and I love the Community Concerts on the Eighth Street bulkhead on Sunday nights. I bring a camp chair, a folding table,

bottle of wine. It's a perfect way to end a weekend. And I almost squeezed in the Mudbugab recently but just didn't get there this year.

The summer concerts continue on Mondays at Hopeland Gardens and Tuesdays at the Apple offer a diverse selection of music.

Downtown Augusta has a wide variety of live music venues. Sky City, with its great stage in consistently is bringing in a wide variety of local and regional musicians. The Cotton Patch I series every Friday and Saturday night. There's a wide range of bars with diverse entertainm has to appeal!

If community theater lights your fire we have numerous theater groups programming everyt musicals and *avant-garde* to religious, children, youth and the Broadway Series at the Bell. intimate theatre on Eighth Street, is the home to Schrodinger's Cat an improv group whose public every First Friday. Reserve your tickets early -- at 88 seats the shows sell out fast! Al produces a great series for the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre.

OVER THE PAST 15 years, I've spoken to numerous people about the arts, what turns the them happy. It boils down to this: There is no set answer to what is "cool" about art or art j cool?

One of my dearest friends and board members back in the 1990s was Joe Konzelman -- "Dr. professor of dentistry at the then-Medical College of Georgia. He was active on my board an events in town. Dr. Joe thought barbershop harmony was cool. He sang with the Garden Cit home in Augusta with that organization.

I know what my "cool" is. I love to walk through museums. I love to hear artists speak. I ge Morris Museum of Art, the Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art, the Mary Bird Gallery at ASU, Artists Row and periodically at Paine College and the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black Hi

Of course, that's not all I enjoy. I like going to the Symphony Pops series. I like indie films, call my name -- actually just about any type of music appeals in the outdoor setting.

I'm willing to try new things. I've taken African drum lessons from Not Gaddy; attended Mis night production in a bar; jumped onstage for a try at improv; and judged *Augusta Idol*.

I love Augusta. I love the ease of commuting. I love our temperate climate. I think I've adju weather, and our mild winters are a pleasure. I always hated walking on ice.

WE HAVE A WIDE variety of events; many are free or so affordable I can gather the loos couch cushions and enjoy an evening out. I think the arts and cultural community is incredi innovative and professional. I'm sure that if we can identify what we're missing, we'll work t

I do have some suggestions for people new to our community. It's easy to find out what's going on at the Arts Council website, most organizations have newsletter sign-up forms on their websites. If you go to a gallery or show, put your name in the book. You'll be added to invitation lists and special events.

Open yourself up to receive information. Listen to local radio, read *The Augusta Chronicle* and *Pick up Verge, Skirt!* and other local publications and get to know them. Read ads, listen to radio hotlinks and "like" us on Facebook. I am sure we can keep you as busy and involved as you want to dedicate to being entertained.

The arts and cultural community is always looking for new audiences, board members, volunteers, and ideas. Jump in. If you think we're missing the boat on a certain area of programming, let me know.

(The writer is executive director of the Greater Augusta Arts Council.)
