

# Vendors, patrons appreciate cool weather, new location at Arts in the Heart

By [Kelsey Stein](#), Staff Writer, Saturday, Sept. 17, 2011

“The weather is absolutely perfect, and it’s packed,” said Sandra Plunkett, the festival’s steering committee chair. “It’s probably the best festival yet.”

Cathy and Sonny Black, of Augusta, have attended the festival for enough years to amass a collection of weekend badges.

“The new location is great,” Cathy said. “It’s under the trees, it incorporates local businesses and it’s in the artsy part of downtown.”

The festival, which opened Friday afternoon and will run through 7 tonight, includes art vendors, food and entertainment stretching from Seventh to 10th streets.

Over the weekend, more than 700 local musicians, performers and actors will appear on the four stages. At Augusta Common, the Global Food Village features booths offering cuisine from countries around the world.

This year, Greece is the host country, allowing their food booth a central location and giving Greek performers the chance to represent their culture onstage through music and dance.

“It’s been over 20 years since Greece last hosted, and this year is important to us because it’s the 100-year anniversary of our parish,” said Penelope Ballas-Stewart, the co-chair of the Greece booth and a member of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.

Business has been outstanding at the Greek food booth, which had a line all night Friday, Ballas-Stewart said.

“We almost can’t keep up with the gyros, feta fries and baklava,” she said. “We sell out as quickly as we can make them.”

Business is booming for arts and crafts vendors, too, many of whom reported their best Friday sales ever.

Tom Shumaker, of Rome, Ga., has returned for a second year to sell his mixed-media art, created from barbed wire, railroad spikes, chains and tin.

“I like meeting people, and I’ve made friends with the other vendors,” Shumaker said. “It’s our little community here, and we help each other out.”

Shumaker said the weather has allowed people to stop and browse his work instead of rushing to find someplace with air conditioning, driving his sales up.

“There’s a lot of reward in watching people staring at my work and smiling, thinking ‘How in the heck did he do that?’ ” he said.