



Case Study: How one Popular Nightlife Created an Appeal for Permanent Residency in Southern Utah

Facing Financial Strain from Instant Popularity and Crowd Growth, George Streetfest Organizers Went to the Whiteboard to Draft a Design that would Carry the Community Loved Event Forward into the Future of Historic Downtown St. George

INTRODUCTION

In October 2014, Emceesquare Media was contracted to create a new first Friday event in southern Utah. Known as Georgefest, the event was designed to address a handful of issues plaguing St. George City's image and to increase foot traffic at Historic Downtown.

By September 2016, the event had grown beyond expectation with survey results touting achievement of goals and objectives. Now faded in memory are the citations issued for public dancing (a 2014 event that made mockery of St. George on Saturday Night Live). Complaints about lack of nightlife and teens having "nothing to do" have also been displaced.



OVERVIEW

When news of a proposed southern Utah nightlife event first broke April 4, 2015, organizers were pleased with The Spectrum and Daily News article titled, "New monthly street festival to draw people downtown." Leading up to the event's June 5 launch, the article by journalist David Demille both introduced the event to the local community and began what would remain a steady stream of ongoing, regional (and often front-page) media coverage during event's first two years of operation.

The majority of media attention was positive. Front-page scandals that beset the event during its first two years included cancellation of a use agreement by Ancestor Square Courtyard which resulted in license relocation issues and a dry - meaning no alcohol - Oktoberfest in 2015. Even for a community whose majority is known for its Mormon conservative values, social outcry ensued in real time over social media channels as attendees arrived at event to news there would be no service of alcohol. Also, in December 2015, the Utah State Department of Insurance Fraud Division announced investigation into the event's insurance policy. A year-long investigation ensued resulting in felony charges filed against the event's insurance agent, Sommer Bowler. In January 2017, Bowler was convicted of insurance fraud and forgery and was sentenced to home confinement with electronic monitoring and restitution.

George Streetfest was designed by Emceesquare Media Inc., a public relations and media production company based in southern Utah, and was created using a public relations strategic planning model. The purposes of the event included providing a safe and fun nightlife option to local residents and tourists, increasing culture at Historic Downtown St. George and showcasing the best of southern Utah's musicians, merchants and entertainers. The event design pulls its brand icons from the pages of local history - St. George was forged from a barren desert climate by Mormon pioneers in the late 1800s.

What some considered a stark juxtaposition between the desires of St. George City's Mormon pioneer settlers and modern-day indie artists, musicians and hipsters, event organizers recognized what they believed to be a unique and opportune similarity. In the same desert community, residents of both generations shared a desire to gather together at the cooling of the day to celebrate. Upon this premise, Emceesquare led the effort to create an event at Historic Downtown that would bring members of modern St. George together for music, food, dancing and fun, just as residents did in the early days of development.

In 2015, the event the first Friday nightlife event George Streetfest was introduced boasting "something for everyone," offering niche activities for all ages. The event plan called for closing Main Street at the center of town on the first Friday night of every month, year-round. Venue components included a free Main Street concert, Food Truck Village, street market featuring artists and crafters, buskers performing for tips, and a Jazz Garden for adults 21 and over. The Jazz Garden created a page in history by introducing the town's first outdoor alcohol service venue. For the first time in town history, adults would be allowed to legally consume alcohol outdoors.

On April 2, 2015, the St. George City Council voted to approve the new monthly event scheduled to launch June 5. To market and promote the George Streetfest, Emceesquare established a robust integrated marketing mix consisting of monthly press releases and maintaining an active blog, website and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). Additional promotional strategies included event-produced professional photos, videos, posters, billboards, a short-format online television show titled "George TV" that aired on St. George News, southern Utah's number one online news source. Also, creation of a promotional event playbill titled "George Magazine" was included in the mix. Additional marketing



and advertising materials produced with media partners were monthly radio ads, television and radio interview segments, magazine advertorials and online photo galleries.

By all indication in its first two years, Emceesquare's marketing mix was successful. The first month's attendance was estimated at 2,500, with Jazz Garden attendees waiting in long lines for the opportunity to drink a glass of wine or beer outdoors at Ancestor Square. With crowds continuing and peaking at more than 5,000, the southern Utah community appeared to have both adopted and embraced the monthly event at its inaugural onset.

Georgefest has emerged in southern Utah as a nightlife event that draws consistent crowds ranging from an estimated 1,000 attendees to more than 5,000, and is the subject of regular media coverage in a variety of mediums. Additionally, the event has an expanding social media presence included more than 14,500 followers as of April 1, 2017. However, strain on event organizers due to the event's rapid growth had resulted in near urgency for organizational changes to be made to allow staff to keep up. Perhaps the momentum of Georgefest ran ahead of its physical capabilities.

SOLUTION

In 2017, Emceesquare led the charge to transition George Streetfest to nonprofit status for the purpose of establishing a plan for longevity and the ability to cultivate grant funding to continue to support performing artists at the event. With the transition came the event name change to Georgefest and the establishment of a board of directors. Emceesquare remained with the event as agency of record for event branding, marketing and public relations efforts, and company president Melynda Thorpe was named Georgefest executive director.

The success of Georgefest is can be credited in part to its consistency. The event operates rain or shine on the first Friday of every month all year long, with significant crowd swells during spring and summer months. Southern Utah has not only come to rely on Georgefest for its fun and varying entertainment offerings, the event has become a beloved resident venue of the community and is often referred to simply as "George" (Kiggins 2015). Many local residents have found their own niche for participation that keeps them coming back every month. Some enjoy the live music, others enjoy the food trucks, nightlife, and staying connected to the community.

What the Media is Saying

"George is cool - and you can party with him every month." – *Spectrum Editor Steve Kiggins*

"I would agree Georgefest offers some of the better nightlife in southern Utah. Georgefest offers college students a free event complete with food, dancing and socializing." – *Hannah Pollock, Dixie Sun News*

"The collaboration and efforts of the city, downtown merchants, sponsors, vendors, artists, and the organizers to generate a nightlife inclusive of our evolving community has been extraordinary. And it's time. Residents and visitors alike should expect to find developing cultural opportunities in this beautiful place we call home." – *Etched Magazine Ediotr Darci Hansen*

"George is here, and its here in a big way!" – *St. George Area Tourism Office web site*

"[Georgefest] is quickly becoming the biggest and hottest party in Southern Utah." – *Hollie Reina of St. George News*



ACTION

Event Description

Georgefest is a monthly community celebration designed to celebrate the best of southern Utah. On the first Friday of every month at Historic Downtown St. George, Main Street is closed between St. George Blvd. and Tabernacle Street at approximately 3 p.m. Located at the heart of the community, a series of coordinated event features begin to take shape. Open hours of the street fest are 6-10 p.m., with the George Jazz Garden venue open until midnight April-October. The Main Street and Tabernacle Street aspects of the event are designed to be family friendly. The Jazz Garden located at Green Gate Village is designed to accommodate adults 21 and over.

In January 2017, the event formerly known as George Streetfest, announced transition from management by a public relations agency to a non-profit organization. The new structure replaced the existing event management organization – the southern Utah-based Emceesquare Media Inc – with a board of directors, executive director, management staff and event committee comprised of community volunteers. The transition was initiated to create a model for sustainability and longevity for a community event that had grown in size and proportion beyond expectation.

Goals

1. Increase foot traffic and economy at Historic Downtown St. George businesses/restaurants/galleries
2. Create a clean, safe and trusted venue where adults, children and youth can dance
3. Add new culture to Historic Downtown

EXECUTION

Goal 1: Increase foot traffic and economy at Historic Downtown St. George businesses/restaurants/galleries

Objective 1. Achieve 1,000 attendees every first Friday night.

Strategy: Create monthly media partnerships and social media following.

Tactics: Establish 3-year monthly sponsorship contracts with local newspapers, magazines, online news organizations, and radio stations for consistent integrated promotion strategy.

Additionally, create social media monthly public events/invitations to build consistent following.



Objective 2. Offer Passport to the City program to draw attendees into businesses/restaurants/galleries every first Friday night

Strategy: Create monthly passport with new sponsor and theme each month.

Tactics: Offer prize incentives for passport completion.

Goal 2: Create a clean, safe and trusted venue where adults, children and youth can dance

Objective 1. Gain required city permit and community support for public dance venue December 2015, December 2016, and ongoing.

Strategy: Gain trust of St. George City officials for management of public annual dance party and share success with city leaders.

Tactics: Apply for permit and make annual presentation to city council. Create DJ Dance Party venue for event featuring favorite local talent among area teens. Encourage adults and children to dance by photographing all ages dancing every first Friday night and promoting the venue on social media.

Objective 2. Establish reputation for event cleanliness.

Strategy: Create team for cleanliness and offer amenities to support cleanliness efforts.

Tactics: Engage event staff, sponsors and volunteers in garbage collection efforts where trash receptacles, streets and tables are swept throughout the evening every first Friday night. Rent porta potties and dumpster every first Friday.

Objective 3. Earn trust of community by holding event first Friday night of every month annually.

Strategy: Communicate annual list of event themes to promote monthly planning.

Tactics: Print postcard brochure outlining monthly themes. Also, communicate event slogan in all marketing and advertising efforts: "Nightlife you can get excited about every first Friday night at Historic Downtown St. George."

Objective 4. Promote safety by coordinating with local law enforcement.

Strategy: Coordinate with officers to attend Georgefest every first Friday night.

Tactics: Encourage officers to attend the event on bikes and foot to interact with the community in a friendly manner, and to enforce positive behavior. Photograph officers interacting with attendees in a positive manner.

Goal 3. Add new culture to Historic Downtown

Objective 1. Engage buskers performing for tips at up to eight designated event locations aligning the



street to encourage variety of budding local talent.

Strategy: Recruit performers from area high schools and surrounding communities to perform talents at the event.

Tactics: Recruit dancers, singers, guitarists, jugglers, magicians, performers of musical instruments, jazz trios, etc. to participate. Offer art demonstrations and booths for community engagement by local artists including pottery wheel, art project tents.

2017 BUDGET RESULTS

Sponsors:

St. George City = \$2,300 monthly

St. George Area Tourism Bureau = \$23,700

Jazz Garden:

Monthly sales at the adult venue of Georgefest are intended to serve as the economic driver of the event. Proceeds from adult beverage sales and cover charges contribute to costs of the free community concert on Main Street and event staffing.

Media Partners:

St. George News Online = \$10,000 annual

Canyon Media Radio = \$3,000-\$5,000 monthly

Etched Magazine = \$10,000 annual

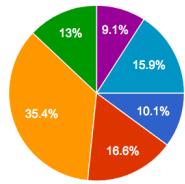
The Independent Newspaper = \$5,000 annual

RESULTS

Survey Mechanism: Each year, Emceesquare Media conducts a community survey. Now in its third year, results from the spring 2017 survey indicate a trend of repeat attendance that is both encouraging and exciting to event organizers.

How often do you attend Georgefest?

308 responses



- I have not yet attended
- I attend every month
- Often (6 times a year or more)
- Rarely (1-2 times a year)
- Sometimes (3-5 times a year)
- Occasionally (3-5 times a year)



Much of the success of Georgefest is attributed to a strong public relations effort resulting in ongoing local and statewide media coverage.



GEORGEFEST

Golden Spike Awards 2017 Submission

Survey efforts also help organizers track progress on event goals, objectives and effectiveness of slogans:

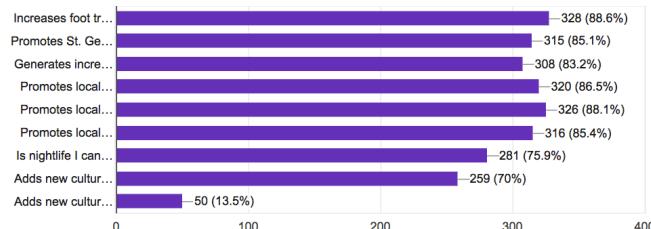
Mark all that apply

- Increases foot traffic downtown
- Promotes St. George's Historic Downtown district
- Generates increased foot traffic to downtown businesses
- Promotes local artists
- Promotes local performers
- Promotes local merchants
- Is nightlife I can get excited about
- Adds new culture to Historic Downtown St. George

2016 Survey Results

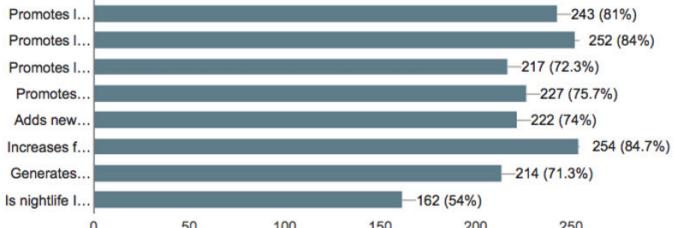
Yes, I agree that George Streetfest ...

370 responses



2017 Survey Results

Yes, I agree that Georgefest ... (Mark all that apply) (300 responses)



Event Brand: The Georgefest brand offers a likable icon, illustrations designed to turn to history of community. At right: sample Passport to the City.



GEORGE
STREETFEST
ST. GEORGE
COMING TO
**MAIN
STREET**
LAUNCHING
JUNE 5
6-10 P.M.



JAZZ GARDEN
FIRST FRIDAY'S @ ANESTOR SQUARE

