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Milwaukee Riverwalk District ends RiverSplash due to increasing costs; marketing efforts to be redirected

MILWAUKEE, Wis. (December 22, 2009) – After 20 years of providing free entertainment along the Milwaukee RiverWalk, the Milwaukee Riverwalk District will discontinue the three-day RiverSplash celebration held in early June. Challenging economic times combined with increasing administrative and operative costs were factors in the decision. The organization hopes to develop new initiatives in 2010.

“The decision to discontinue RiverSplash has not been an easy one,” said Marsha Sehler, board member of the Milwaukee Riverwalk District. “RiverSplash has had a successful 20-year run, but festivals are costly ventures and have their life cycles. It’s time for us to redirect our energies.”

RiverSplash began in 1989 as a way to introduce the community to Milwaukee’s expanding riverwalk system and its neighboring businesses. As the unofficial kick off to Milwaukee’s festival season, RiverSplash grew to attract 165,000 attendees annually. Last year, the event was restructured to better control crowds and help monitor alcohol consumption. In addition, larger name acts were hired to help drive food and beverage sales, yet another year of inclement weather continued to dampen the festival’s profits.

“When you’re in the event business, weather can make you or break you,” said Sehler. “Unfortunately, with several years of bad weather and our increasing costs associated with producing a free, family-friendly event, the return has not been sustainable. Within the last year, other veteran events across the country have fallen victim to tough economic times. It’s forced us all to be savvier in how we market our neighborhoods and cities.”

Moving forward, the Milwaukee Riverwalk District will evaluate new opportunities to showcase the vitality of the Milwaukee RiverWalk and attract visitors downtown.

“2010 will be a new year for the Milwaukee Riverwalk District,” said Sehler. “So much of our time was consumed planning for RiverSplash. We now have time to take a fresh look at things.”

Since its inception in 1992, the Milwaukee Riverwalk District has served as a catalyst for development along the Milwaukee River. Flourishing with the creation of attractive housing and exciting pubs and restaurants, the Milwaukee Riverwalk District helps maintain the RiverWalk’s infrastructure, sponsors permanent and temporary art installations such as River Sculptures, River Gems and the Milwaukee Plein Air competition, and organizes the mid-September Milwaukee River Challenge.

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