

PORTSMOUTH PARTNERSHIP

Promoting economic growth, leadership and education within the City of Portsmouth

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PortsEvents: SHARPER FOCUS FOR 2011



Don Comer, top; Lewis McGehee

There's a new way to unwind after work on the First Friday of every month, and it's happening in one of the oldest places in Hampton Roads: Olde Towne Portsmouth. From within the wrought-iron fencing of the ivy-trimmed brick courtyard, in the cool shadow of the majestic 1842 Courthouse, under deep green live-oaks, within reach of the Elizabeth River's breeze and the deep bronze vibe of Trinity Church's great bells, you'll find music, camaraderie and a cold beer or glass of wine. **"Concerts in the Courtyard"** is a hit. Music and parking are free. Voluntary donations for beverages benefit the Museums Foundation. And, when the music stops at 8, you and your friends can walk to any one of over 20 restaurants in Olde Towne. Whoa! - what's not to love?



If you're still longing for more, simply turn up at **9am** on Saturday morning when Col. Crawford rings his bell to signal the start of the **Court Street Farmers' Market**, held **every Saturday** through November 19. Seafood, fruit, veggies, eggs, meat, bread, herbs and more are sold until 1pm by some of the area's top vendors.

Both events are the natural outgrowth of a nearly three year old Portsmouth Partnership effort to put "feet on the street" in Olde Towne. In October of 2008 members of the Portsmouth Partnership identified several significant challenges facing the Olde Towne section of our city: budget cuts had forced the elimination of the city's **Convention and Visitors' Bureau**; the **Olde Towne Business Association** lacked **\$7,800** worth of funding for a WVEC-TV channel 13 ad campaign aimed at salvaging its upcoming Christmas selling season; and the advancing recession's chill winds that were blowing into all corners of the economic landscape had, indeed, seen several businesses along High Street either close or move. Having established the area as a **Historic District** in 2004,

the **Portsmouth Partnership's** promotions of **Roger Brown's** and what is now the **Dinwiddie Hotel** had complemented other significant Olde Towne projects such as the **Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center**, **Porte Center**, the **nTelos** amphitheatre, the **Virginia Sports Hall of Fame** and the now-completed **Children's Museum of Virginia**. Clearly, too much had been invested – and too much was at stake – to stand idly by as the recession chewed through these hard-won assets.



String Ties: Bluegrass on the corner



The Partnership's response was to convene all of Olde Towne's stakeholders, from shop and restaurant owners to residents and City officials, in order to take an inventory of the area's assets and plan a way forward. Among the action plan items were: paying the \$7,800 tab for the OTBA's Christmas campaign; sending available representatives to CVB-related tourism conventions; promoting First Friday and First Saturday Antiques-to-Flea Market events with banners and newspaper ads; and creating a twice-monthly Farmers' market. A brand-new non-profit affiliate, **PortsEvents**, was created to administer the effort.

Today, after two years' worth of effort, three **Restaurant Weeks**, two **Pub Crawls**, two **Schooner Days** weekends and two **Downtown Living** tours, things are changing, and good things are happening. The Children's Museum of Virginia is now open, and Olde Towne restaurants have formed the **Portsmouth Independent Restaurant Association, PIRA**, to coordinate Restaurant Weeks, Pub Crawls and other events. Major sponsorship support from **TowneBank**, along with support from the **Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority** and the **Portsmouth Economic Development Authority** has enabled PortsEvents to place "First Friday" and "Farmers' Market" median strip banners along High Street and, for 2011, focus its attention on the monthly "Concerts in the Courtyard" series and a first-class, weekly Farmers' Market.



Farmers' Markets address the "locovore" diners' desire to eat healthy, local foods, and are gaining dramatically in popularity. Olde Towne provides a perfect **weekly** setting for such a specialty event.

Music's gravitational pull will always entice people to congregate. What better way to put "feet on the street" than in such a beautiful location as the Courthouse Galleries? PortsEvents is grateful for the museum's willingness to host this year's series which, in the coming months, will include jazz artist Charles Darden, tunesmith Robbin Thompson, solo artist Mike Proffitt and bluesman Bobby "Blackhat" Walters. There's something for everyone in Olde Towne. Come on down - and bring a friend or two!



GPDC 12 years 1,000 jobs \$12,000,000 tax revenue

