PURPOSE

The “Sharp Flats” Guided Loft Tour was an excellent opportunity for Waco residents to experience a taste of urban living in the Downtown area and also provided a platform for the Waco Symphony to showcase their “fun” side and their commitment to being an integral part of the Waco community.

HOW SHARP FLATS CAME TO BE

In today’s world where non-profits are competing for fund raising dollars, we sought an opportunity to partner with other organizations. The goal was to collaborate with other organizations who were not interested in sharing our profit, but who could benefit from exposure through our channels. During our planning phase, a Loft Tour event in the Gold Book caught our interest because of similarities in the symphony council size as well as the city itself. With the downtown area experiencing a resurgence, and a historical landmark, The Hippodrome Theater undergoing renovation, we saw an opportunity to draw from an outside support base and the media attention these events were generating. Within the two block area surrounding the theater, are architecturally unique loft homes, whose owners were seeking an outlet to showcase these relatively unknown treasures. The Hippodrome Theater, a project that was being funded in part through tax dollars, was seeking to make friends with the community. These factors combined resulted in Celebrate Waco’s Sharp Flats Tours ~ a ticketed event celebrating Waco’s downtown resurgence.

The tours provided a first look into five breathtaking lofts all located along Austin Avenue, including a hard-hat tour of the highly anticipated Hippodrome Theater. Each loft hosted an “experience” such as food sampling, wine tasting, live orchestral music, floral arranging, etc. These experiences were sponsored by local downtown merchants.

Planning for this first-time event began in February, fourteen months out, with a core team of five volunteers in the following areas: Tour Chair, Marketing, Print Media, VP Fund raising (contracts, budgeting, permitting), Hippodrome Theater community adviser. A name, logo, and committee chairs were secured by August. In September city permitting, and contracts were under way. By October, loft owner contracts and loft sponsors were in the works, and confirmed by December. By November, the dedicated Face book page, website and promotions were well under way. In January the marketing team was busy promoting the event through social media channels, community meetings, symphony parties, as well as reaching out through media channels. The online ticket sales site was live by January. Advertisements were placed in the symphony programs. In February, The Loft Tour chair was finalizing plans for each loft experience, soliciting donations for the swag bag giveaways as well as assigning tour guides. The tour map with sponsor logos were under final proofing and design by mid-March. The marketing team was hitting media exposure hard by March, with magazine cover stories, television spots and newspaper write ups. Twenty-nine volunteers were lined up and trained for their duties by end of March. Volunteer jobs included, loft hosts and “historians,” tour guides, swag bag “packers” and disbursing, ticket table, crowd control and group scheduling.

EVENT DETAILS

- Tickets prices for the Loft Tours were $15 and $10 for students (ages 10 - 18).
- Tickets holders received a “Sharp Flats” Loft Tour canvas tote bag along with multiple sips and tastes of local flavors throughout the tour.
- Ticket sales totaled $4,289.00, with expenses totaling $455.00, showing a net profit of $3,874.00
- In-kind donations for food sampling, wine tasting, music, floral, signage, swag bags totaled $4,680.00

IMPACT

This project received unsolicited press coverage leading up to the event. It was featured as the coveted cover story of the popular Waco Today Magazine, as well as full page write ups in various other papers and magazines. Tickets sold out the morning of the event, and customers had to be turned away at the door. The buzz within the community continued months following.

It was discovered that the swag bags and experiences in each loft were very popular, yet unexpected with the tourists; therefore determined that the food sampling, wine tasting, etc. could have been advertised more; thus increasing the perceived value of the tickets. Other loft owners voiced interest in being included in a future event. Due to the popularity of this tour, the idea of two to three concurrent tours would meet demand as well as offer new experiences for repeat customers.

The Loft Tours has been voted in as the Council’s main fundraiser for a second year, with plans to triple the net income. Ticket prices will increase to $30, with two loft tours offered. A restaurant/pub tour is also being considered. The Loft Tour will coincide with a patron party and silent auction to be held the night of the event on the rooftop of a downtown loft building.

http://www.wacosymphonycouncil.com/sharp-flats.php
Today’s tour features a sneak-peek of the Waco Hippodrome Theatre along with a look into five recently renovated lofts on Austin Ave.

Be sure to keep up with your tour guide, take lots of photos, enjoy tastes & bites from our sponsors and be sure to use our hashtag!

#celebratewaco

Celebrate Waco Presents: A Taste of Urban Living in Downtown Waco

Saturday, April 12, 2014

Photos by Fox Aydelotte. Waco Tribune-Herald & Waco Today