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LIFE TODAY

Galleries host arty get-together

Stuart Low
Staff writer

(November 1, 2007) — If you see unfamiliar buses stopping repeatedly at Rochester's smaller art galleries Friday night, don't be alarmed.

No heist is in progress, and the drivers haven't lost their bearings from end-of-week fatigue. This is a new tour of local galleries, designed to give the city's scattered arts scene more of a collaborative focus.

From 6 to 9 p.m. on the first Friday of each month, riders can visit up to 14 studios, art centers and exhibit spaces around the city. The event was organized by Rochester Contemporary Art Center, one of the tour's starting points.

"We wanted to create more public awareness of these galleries," says Executive Director Bleu Cease. "It's a way of reinvesting in the city and putting more bodies on the street."

Many residents still remember Galleries Night, the September kickoff to the art galleries season. Buyers drove or walked between participating shops, sipping wine and noshing on hors d'oeuvres to keep up their stamina.

That annual affair has petered out since 2003 as several key galleries folded. The new First Friday revives some of its features but provides more services.

If you go
What: First Friday, a new bus tour of Rochester art galleries.
When: 6 to 9 p.m. Friday.
Admission: Free.
Call: (585) 461-2222 or go to www.firstfridayrochester.org

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Instead of foot power, visitors will rely on two buses departing from the University of Rochester's Rush Rhees Library and Rochester Contemporary, 137 East Ave.

Each bus will make three loops around the galleries, one 20 minutes behind the other.

Commuters can park at the East End Parking Garage and catch a bus at Rochester Contemporary roughly every 20 minutes.

The buses will be rented from the University of Rochester and paid for by Mike Lesczinski, owner of Rochester Art Supply. But sponsors are still needed to keep future First Fridays free to tourists.

Gallery owners see several advantages to the new event.

"The fact that we'll all be working together is very exciting," says Zerbe Sodervick, director of Gallery r at 775 Park Ave.

"But it means something special for us. We'll keep our doors open later than usual, so pedestrians can work us into their evening agenda with other Park Avenue shops and restaurants," Sodervick says.

In addition to First Friday, Rochester Contemporary recently launched a quarterly arts shuttle between Rochester and Syracuse. More than 40 Rochesterians bused to Syracuse galleries on Sept. 20, and 25 Syracuse residents toured local galleries on Oct. 5.

The next exchange has not been scheduled, and organizers are working to involve Buffalo art venues as well.

Maps and bus schedules for First Friday will be available at all participating galleries.

For a digital map and complete list of exhibits, go to www.firstfridayrochester.org.

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