

### Party along Jefferson

By Carolyn Gorski

When Luther "Badman" Keith let the guitar riff run loose, a crowd of over 4,000 spectators clapped in unison to "Barbecue Baby." Keith joined Thornetta Davis, R. J. Spangler and Lonnie Brooks in serenading the revival of the Jefferson East Business District during an eight-hour concert in mid-June.



*Music, food, arts and crafts highlighted the first Jazzin' on Jefferson concert. Chairs replaced cars for two blocks as neighbors and friends chatted with one another.*

*Photo by Chris Garland.*

"When I look at the photos from the event, I see a density of people and businesses that Jefferson and Chalmers has not experienced in decades," said Jefferson East Program Director Chris Garland, "I guess we can say that people will turn out for a good party: people will turn out if you provide quality services and experiences."

Attendees browsed a healthy mix of local vendor displays of jewelry, artwork and homemade crafts. Others sampled barbecue and Cajun dishes from local eateries, sort of a miniature Comerica TasteFest.

The beat was vibrant enough to hit the core of community-building, according to Libby Pachota, program director for planning and development. Jefferson East, a two-mile district encompassing St. Jean on the west, Alter on the east, Charlevoix on the North and the River to the South, wants to stop singing the blues about empty storefronts and start celebrating once-again vibrant streets.

"We have a tradition of great musical sounds in this neighborhood," Pachota says. In the 1920s and 1930s Dizzy Gillespie and other greats entertained crowds at the Vanity and Monticello Ballrooms. In the 1960s Iggy Pop Stooze developed a following. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, people came from miles around for Concerts by the River in nearby Maheras Park.

The free concert was underwritten by Charter One Bank and DaimlerChrysler Corporation. The automaker builds the Jeep Grand Cherokee at its Jefferson East Assembly Plant in the neighborhood. Other patrons made personal contributions.

The concert is just a first step in an overall strategy to revive the Jefferson Chalmers community as a focus of entertainment and technology. Royal Oak went from a moribund community to the epicenter of loft development, restaurants and dot-com companies in a decade of active redevelopment. The Jefferson East district received a \$100,000 catalyst grant from the state of Michigan to help morph itself as a Cool City.

Good news follows the sound of the saxophone and cymbals. A Farmer Jack recently opened on the strip, joining 60 other merchants along Jefferson. Michigan Department of Transportation has a major road improvement underway.

Housing options abound. U Snap Back, a public-private housing consortium is building single family and town homes along Alter. More than 500 new units have been added to the neighborhood since the mid-1990s. Another 500 units are planned within two years. Ambitious plans are underway to add 3,000 to 4,000 homes within the next ten years.



Could a jazz concert really help jumpstart East Jefferson into a more vital community with ongoing clubs playing the blues and jazz? "Sure enough," says Garland of the business district. He saw how the Comerica TasteFest in the New Center Area launched businesses and housing, and how the Festival of Arts produced by the University Cultural Center Association sparked a revival of the Midtown District, one of the most happening sectors of the city.

"We know there's a tremendous amount of energy in this community," Garland adds. "We're already planning next year's concert."

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*For further information about the Jefferson East Business Association or to get involved in Jazzin' on Jefferson 2005 call The JEBA offices at (313) 331-7939.*

*Carolyn Gorski, Michigan State University student intern at Patricia R. McCarthy Marketing & Public Relations can be reached at (313) 882-9200.*