

Shops say festival helped business

Jackson Heights store owners liked crowd from Viva la Comida

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by Josey Bartlett, Editor



PHOTO BY JOSEY BARTLETT

Sprint 2 owner Eli Arazi, left, stood outside his establishment with his employee Jose Matteo during Friday's Viva la Comida festival. Arazi said he hadn't seen a boost in business during the food and music event, but thought the exposure boded well for the future.

Hundreds of people filled the streets surrounding the newly improved Dunningham Triangle in Jackson Heights for the Viva la Comida food and music festival on Friday. And although festival goers were sticking to the streets and not filling the retail shops, store owners said the event meant only good things for business.

"I like the crowd," Sprint 2 owner Eli Arazi said. His apparel store has been across from the triangle where 82nd Street joins with Baxter Avenue for 20 years.

The welcoming atmosphere means more business in the long run, Arazi said. The movie theater also brings traffic to the store on weekend nights, he added.

And the cinema was doing its own part to draw a crowd on Friday. The venue hosted a craft market by Design For You — artist Elliot Bassman was selling his brightly colored drawings and paintings, several booths were selling jewelry and Brenda Hernandez was drawing a crowd with her face painting. A few children wandered into the theater to play the arcade games, but as in the other spots, most of the customers stayed in the sun.

"Business didn't pick up today, but it's a nice atmosphere," The Sewing Outlet owner Steve Gruber said. "It's a good crowd. I got to talk to a lot of people."

The little over 70-year-old store gave away stitched hats with the logo of the nonprofit charged with beautifying 82nd Street from the tip of the triangle to 37th Avenue — the 82nd Street Partnership — which hosted the event. People gathered to watch the machine-stitching demonstration. The wait for a cap stretched out for an hour.

Unlike the retail stores, restaurants saw a business uptick, 82nd Street Partnership Executive Director Seth Taylor said.

"It was more of a food event — so people really came out to eat," he said.

Restaurants on 82nd Street — such as Taqueria Coatzingo, Limoncello Italian Restaurant and Louie's Pizzeria — set up booths outside their doors. Louie's saw a spike in business, the restaurant's owner told Taylor and Taqueria Coatzingo filled most of its tables during the event.

"There was a lot of spillover traffic into brick and mortar establishments," Taylor said.

Several food carts also filled the streets around Dunningham Triangle attracting lines and crowds even though a couple of the carts were hours late, the event's food cart organizer Jeff Orlick said.

The 82nd Partnership said overall the event was a success and the group plans on hosting a second Viva la Comida next September.

"I hope more businesses take advantage of the crowd and that we see them offer more specials," Taylor said. "Because it was the first year, people didn't know what to expect. Now they do, and I expect they will take advantage of the opportunity."

In August the group fixed up Dunningham Triangle by trimming down shrubs, washing away bird excrement, removing overflowing trash cans and filling the space with bark chips. Businesses and residents applauded the effort.

The nonprofit has already procured about \$220,000 in grant money to put toward those improvements as well as Wi-Fi, tables and chairs and fitness and entertainment programs.