

Frenchtown Hosts RIVERFEST 2010: Marti Gras / Arti Gras

Frenchtown, N.J. will host the 6th Annual RIVERFEST on Saturday and Sunday, Sept 4 and 5. This festive event closes the summer season and is the annual highlight for this charming Victorian river town, famous for its quality shops, welcoming atmosphere, and fine dining. The theme this year is "Mardi Gras / Arti Gras", celebrating the joys of life along the river and featuring local artisans. Sponsored by the Frenchtown Business and Professional Association, RIVERFEST features many family friendly activities and a score of invited vendors and not-for-profit organizations as well as favorite stores and restaurants.

Cleo Sharplin of Alchemy Clothing on Bridge Street, chair of the event, said, "In the past we have focused on "green" themes and those festivals have been very successful. People really responded to our efforts to call attention to living a 'greener' lifestyle. We certainly are not abandoning our commitment to the environment, which was the reason behind the founding of RIVERFEST. This year we felt, however, that, with so much negativity in the world, we should focus on enjoyment and to remind ourselves how fortunate we are to live in such a magnificent area of the country. We feel that one way to do that is celebrating local artisans and local talent, people who add so much to the pleasure of living in the Delaware River Valley. Nothing says enjoyment more than the idea of 'Mardi Gras.' It is sort of like Christmas in July; our out-of-season revelry will extol the year-round celebration of living well."

The weekend kicks off on Friday, Sept. 3 with the annual Wine Tasting from 6:00 – 8:30 pm in the main tent on Bridge Street next to the Frenchtown Inn, and benefiting the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, a noted land conservation organization in Hunterdon County NJ. The tasting features dozens of wineries from around world. Wines are provided courtesy of the Wine Hut and tasters will be able to place wine orders at discounted prices. Tickets in advance are \$25 or \$30 at the door. For reservations and tickets call, 908-237-4582 or www.hlta.org.

Local artists are encouraged to participate in the "Mardi Gras/ Arti Gras" Mailable Mask project. These masks will be exhibited at the wine tasting on Friday night, and throughout the weekend. Proceeds from their sales will benefit the Hunterdon Humane Animal Shelter. To participate in this event (deadline for submission on line is August 15), please visit this link: <http://www.civilianbasics.com/mardigras.maskguidelines.htm>

Throughout the weekend there will be live music in the main tent, featuring bands such as The Voodudes, Mikey Jr. Blues Band, Top Soil, Blue Route and the Val Sivilli Band. On Saturday and Sunday at 1 pm there will be a sidewalk "parade of kids" dressed for Mardi Gras. Come catch some beads!

And the highlight of the weekend at 2:00 pm on Sunday will again be the pet costume contest, with more than a dozen categories for awards. Pets should be costumed based on the theme of "Mardi Gras / Arti Gras." To enter a pet, contact Cleo Sharplin at Alchemy, 908 996-9000. There is no charge for entry. In the past awards have been made to local owners of pets as diverse as ponies, pigs, chickens, bunnies, grasshoppers, birds and, of course, dogs and cats. All category winners will receive trophies. This year's judges will include last year's master of ceremonies, Jeff Tareilla.

Civilian will be offering a limited edition Festival Tee shirt for Riverfest this year. To preorder your tee, contact civilianart@me.com or visit civilianart.com for more info.

Local merchants on Bridge Street, Harrison Street, Race Street and Trenton Avenue will feature special promotions and end of season sales as well as their usual diverse and upscale merchandise. According to Ms. Sharplin, "Even if there were no holiday event, Frenchtown is

always a destination for people from throughout the New York and Philadelphia region. Frenchtown is known for its high quality shops, fine dining, quaint river town feel, and friendly residents. We are a thriving, year-round village, but Labor Day weekend is always special."

Vendors for Marti Gras / Arti Gras on the main lot next to the Frenchtown Inn will include a number of returning jewelers, book dealers, graphic and fine artists, fitness and wellness services, and not-for-profit organizations. The very popular Chestnut Hill Farms will also return with its variety of gourmet foods. New this year will be vendors selling exquisite silk flower arrangements, calligraphy, specialty clothes, prayer rugs, as well as new vendors of jewelry and art.

Local restaurants and the Lions Club of Frenchtown will be serving food throughout the weekend. Free parking is available in several town lots (such as the renovated lot along the river), on side streets, and at designated church parking lots on Saturday and after services on Sunday. Paid parking benefiting the Lion's Club is available behind the main tent (entrance from Second Street at Harrison Street) and at the far end of Front Street. "Visitors are urged to obey speed limits and parking restrictions as tickets will be issued to violators," Ms. Sharplin reminded everyone. "Our police officers are friendly and helpful, but also dedicated to insuring everyone has a safe visit."