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The Good Life: Hot Italian adds free Fremont Park concerts to its menu

rkushman@sacbee.com

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One trait of a great city is the way people connect to public spaces, like waterfronts, plazas or parks. Another is the way businesses get their own connections to those spots.

In a sign of Sacramento's growing sophistication, Hot Italian is serving up a series of free lunchtime concerts in Fremont Park.

They're every Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Sept. 24 – this week it'll be Richard March entertaining – and you can order a pizza, or any food, from Hot Italian from a booth at the park and have it delivered to you during the concert.

Of course, this is a way for Hot Italian to boost its lunch business. Can you blame a restaurant for hustling these days?

But it's also a commitment to the neighborhood vibe, and to the city's music scene, so if these concerts are any kind of success, everyone wins.

"The park could be used so much more," said Hot Italian owner Andrea Lepore. "There are so many office buildings and people nearby. We want to showcase that the park is a great venue, and to showcase our business, too."

Hot Italian is at 16th and Q streets. Fremont Park is across the street. Obviously, Lepore has a business stake in the park, but that doesn't make these concerts any less vital.

"In a lot of ways, Fremont is our backyard for the neighborhood," said Bob Lagomarsino, a planner, neighbor and director of the Capital Area Development Authority. "We want to feel comfortable there, and that's what so good about the events Andrea has sponsored, and things the city's done, too, because it has gotten more comfortable."

And if we're talking urbane cities, this is what you want from restaurants and businesses: That their promotions also do some good for the neighborhood.

These events fit Sacramento's personality. A concert or a festival resonates here and adds to the energy to the city.

It's not just Hot Italian jumping into this concert and festival pool. There's Lounge on 20's Sunday Fun Day mini-fests starting this weekend at 20th and K streets. And in recent months, there's been a steady stream of block parties and festivals.

From her standpoint, Lapore said events like the concerts make her feel woven into her community.

"We really want to support art and music programs," she said. "We want to be involved in every aspect of that community. Art. Food. Wine. They're so Italian."

And speaking of both art and Fremont Park, a reminder that Chalk It Up will be making its splash on the sidewalks around the park from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday through Monday.

It raises money for kids' art activities and education, and engages 200 artists – some regular folk, and some big talents. A \$10 donation buys you a personal square and a box of chalk. Businesses can sponsor a sidewalk square for a donation of \$150 or more.

An extra-important meal

Breakfast, as you know, is the most important meal, especially the annual Suits and Slippers feast Sept. 10 at Market Square at Arden Fair. Oh sure, it benefits the Roberts Family Development Center, which does all kinds of good work for North Sacramento families. Yeah, there's a celebrity cereal-eating contest, a silent auction and a nice food spread. But here's the good part.

You can bid to have breakfast with me. Or, you know, real celebrities. There's an online auction – at www.robertsfdc.com – to have "breakfast in bed" (we'll sit on top of a bed, actually) with the celeb of your choice, lavishly catered by Ettore's. Besides me, you can bid for county Supervisor Roger Dickinson, a Sacramento King to be named later – isn't that always the way – or Sarah and Rachel Campbell, the sisters who run the Sacramento lifestyle blog Twinsoup.com.

Tickets are being sold at the Web site I mentioned and cost \$35. It's 7:30 to 9 a.m. Wear a suit and your goofiest slippers. There's a slipper contest, too.

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