

VISUAL ARTS

Radical changes afoot at Maitland festival

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Our local art scene continues to evolve and improve almost daily. Most often it's small changes, such as a new piece of public art, or subtle, behind-the-scenes changes such as what's happening with our very popular annual [Maitland](#) Rotary Art Festival, held every fall for the past 32 years (my 29-year-old son saw much of his first art there while riding on my shoulders). They've practically reinvented -- and hopefully reinvigorated! -- the show. First, they've changed the date to the first weekend in October (Oct. 3-5 this year); there'll be live background music; there will be fewer artists but a greater quality of art (cut from 225 artists to 150); you'll see no pesky "removed for judging" stickers and thereby miss seeing what the judges selected; and (drum roll please!) it will become Florida's first nighttime art festival. Amazing changes!

Better yet . . . be still my heart . . . organizers have stated in writing, "We gathered a focus group of artists and listened to their ideas. The mission of the festival is to concentrate on the sale of fine art. The changes are all about bringing customers and artists together to create sales." I'm almost in tears! Imagine, asking artists for ideas, who'd a thunk it! I used to (notice the past tense) show my art in outdoor festivals, but each year they seemed to get a little more "commercial" and more interested in making money for their designated charities than actually selling fine art. Art patrons would have to sift through booths of crafts, resale items (think "flea market"), plants, plant-hangers, beer-can hats, molded ceramics, home decor items, etc. All of this mixed in with the truly "fine art" devalued the perception of the art and also made it difficult to sell original fine art at a fair price. Hopefully, Maitland's new format will be successful and start a trend that raises the quality of fine-art shows. On behalf of artists and the art-loving public, I'd like to thank everyone involved in these changes!