



May 13, 2009

## Scrimping Lee County arts venues will stay with the sure bets

### More summer events planned at Germain

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The 2008-09 season is mostly over. Now many arts groups and venues are looking toward summer and next season.

Entertainment options typically dry up during the summer. Many art galleries, for example, are closing or switching to fewer operating hours.

Still, some places continue to offer a few entertainment events. The idea is to make at least some money during the summer, offsetting any future losses.

Germain Arena is offering much more than it did last year. This year's options include rockers Judas Priest and Whitesnake, the psychedelic circus Cirque du Soleil and the kids show Thomas and Friends.

In general, there seem to be more touring shows out there than there were at this time last year, said Sammy Wallace, the arena's vice president of event programming. And that's a good sign that things are improving.

Last July, Germain hosted only two events, Wallace said. This July, there will be 13.

Of course, most arts groups are working to make sure the 2009-10 season goes smoothly. That means more budget cuts and fewer gambles on unproven shows and events.

One thing that's changed for next season is more of a reliance on sure things. Venues want guaranteed room fillers.

Space 39 gallery, for example, plans to do more group shows and more themed art shows such as its annual Dark Arts exhibit. Those draw more people than shows revolving around individual artists, owner Terry Tincher said.

Southwest Florida Symphony plans to cut its low-selling Sunday matinees, resulting in three fewer classical-music concerts next season, said executive director Fran Goldman. But they're adding two more pops concerts.

The pops shows are more popular and will sell more, Goldman said.

Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall general manager Scott Saxon expects next season will do just as well as this - if not better - thanks to its line-up of potential hit shows. Those include "Jersey Boys," former "American Idol" Taylor Hicks in "Grease" and the Disney classic "Beauty and the Beast."

You can't take as much of a risk on shows in an economy like this, Saxon said.

"You can't do art for art's sake," Saxon said. "In times like these, if you give the people what they want, they'll come."

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