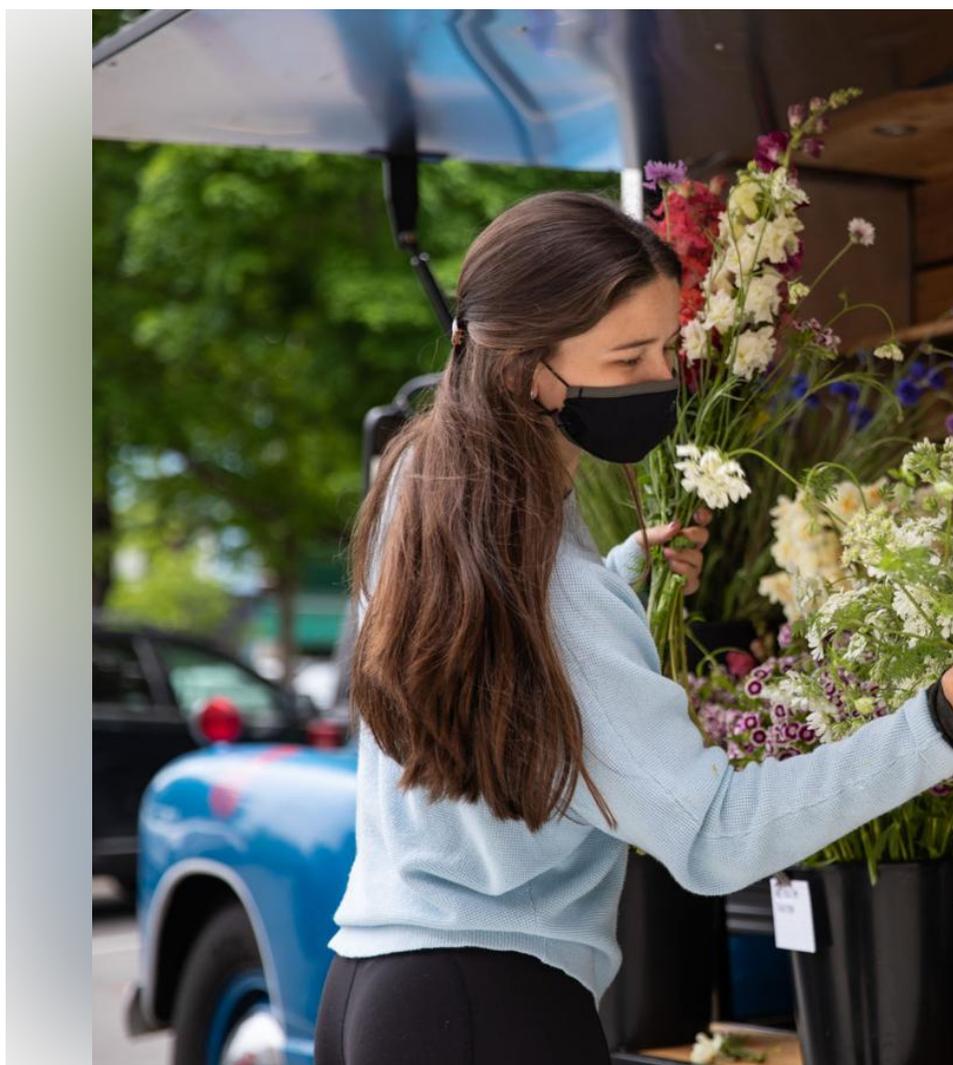


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## 'Hoping downtown will come alive'

By DON SERGENT [dsergent@bgdailynews.com](mailto:dsergent@bgdailynews.com)

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Sydney Wheeler of River Bend Blooms organizes a bouquet for a custom Bank. at Fountain Square Park for the inaugural Social on the Square eve lure people to downtown Bowling Green after the COVID-19 pandemic d businesses surrounding Fountain Square Park holding one-day special c Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com

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Local  
businesses  
gather  
downtown for  
inaugural  
Social on the  
Square event

Renaissance, it seems, sounds a bit like a zydeco tune played on a concertina, smells like fresh-cut flowers and looks like a full parking lot.

Aiming for a post-pandemic revival in Bowling Green's downtown business district, merchants along Fountain Square Park organized Saturday's "Social on the Square" event that lured some healthy foot traffic to the area with deals and promotions.

Parking spaces around the refurbished square were mostly occupied, which was a welcome sight for merchants like Jessica Hayes, owner of The Hearth Room at 906 State St.

"It has been good," said Hayes, who opened the home decor retail store in February, while a half-dozen shoppers browsed. "Foot traffic has been way better than normal.

"If we could have this kind of traffic every weekend, it would be great."

Hayes was among the organizers of the event, along with Kristen Robinette, owner of the Back Down South boutique on Park Row.

Robinette, who has been in her downtown location for more than five years, said Saturday's event would last from morning until night, with businesses like hers offering discounts and specials during the day while restaurants and bars might offer promotions in the evening.

"It's a community effort," Robinette said. "Every business is kinda doing their own thing. We just hope people come out and enjoy the day."

Robinette said she was hoping the event would give a jump-start to downtown merchants who have struggled in recent years.

"The construction phase for the downtown area was an absolute nightmare," she said. "Then the pandemic hit.

"Now I think downtown is on its way back. A lot of young professionals are living here in the new apartments."

Back Down South had a good bit of traffic both inside and out Saturday, thanks in part to the floral fragrances coming from the River Bend Blooms flower business that set up shop with its custom-made flower truck just outside Robinette's store.

Michelle Wheeler, River Bend Blooms owner, was doing a bustling business out of the 1947 Chevrolet truck that has been retrofit and now includes solar panels on top to power the cooling system for the flowers.

Primarily a wholesaler to local flower shops, River Bend Blooms periodically sets up at local events; but Wheeler said downtown is her favorite spot.

"I love being downtown," she said as a steady stream of customers perused her flowers. "It's very active on a Saturday morning."

Those enjoying Wheeler's flowers could also walk across the square and enjoy the music coming from sidewalk busker Jerone Williams,

who was playing his concertina in front of Morris Jewelry on East Main Avenue.

“I normally come here about once a week and play near the fountain,” said Williams, a 30-year-old caregiver who plans to study music therapy. “The Morris Jewelry guys asked me if I would play in front of the store today.”

Like the merchants who organized “Social on the Square,” Williams saw his playing as a way to support downtown Bowling Green.

“It’s a wonderful thing to do,” he said. “A lot of these businesses are locally owned. As an artist, I like to support local artists and local businesses.”

That’s a sentiment that would hit the right note with business owners like Courtney Murley, who opened her Hot Mess Mama Boutique on State Street just a week ago.

It’s the second retail location for Murley, who also has a store in Owensboro, and she believes Saturday’s event will help her

business and others get established in what she believes is an increasingly vibrant downtown.

“I knew this was where our second store needed to be,” said Murley, a Western Kentucky University graduate. “I can’t wait to be a part of the community.

“I’m hoping downtown will come alive.”

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**Don Sergent**