

## Downtown Night Out returns to large crowd

By Will Jennings

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GALLUP — Overcast skies, 15-mph wind and a light drizzle were no match for the first Downtown Night Out in a year as 200 people filled the Coal Street Commons Saturday to hear live music, support local business and enjoy all that Gallup's historic downtown has to offer.

The event, organized by Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District, was a smash hit featuring The Starlette Dancers, Gallup local Austin Ramirez and the DinÃ© Boyz, who all performed during the two-hour event.

People of all ages were already scoping out spots an hour before the event. With half an hour until showtime, a crowd of about 100 people had gathered. By 5 p.m., that number doubled.

Gallup MainStreet Executive Director Kara Smith said the turnout was exciting given this was the first big downtown event after COVID-19 restrictions were eased in the spring.

"It was so wonderful to see that many people there," Smith said. "It had such a great spirit to it!"

There was one potential problem. The skies were overcast, threatening to overshadow the event that Gallup MainStreet had been planning since pandemic restrictions were eased. Some residents were prepared with umbrellas; most were dressed for fairer weather.

But, by the time the Starlette Dancers took the stage, fears of bad weather upstaging the event were gone; the rain and wind had disappeared. The sun had even

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The DinÃ© Boyz perform for a crowd of 200 people at at

the first in-person Downtown

Night Out since June 2020 at the Coal Street Commons in Gallup Saturday.

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## Night Out

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begun to peek out from behind the previously dark skies. Gallup was ready to celebrate summer and with it, the easing of the pandemic.

### Crowds still cause anxiety for some

performing again for large crowds regularly; the band had to pause in-person performances when COVID hit.

"It's always good to be out here enjoying the music doing what I love with my family," Jones said. "We're slowly getting back to what we want to do." Even when the music stopped, people kept the event going. Many nearby businesses saw their foot traffic increase as people sought out food after two hours of

When the Diné Boyz took the stage half an hour into the event, there was an almost anxious energy as the town seemed to adjust to being in groups again.

Gallup resident Jessica Warren, who was there to support her daughter on the dance team, said it was good to finally see things happening in town.

Still, Warren, outfitted in a mask and standing away from the crowd, said she was nervous; she had not been around this many people in a long time because of the pandemic.

"It feels good to be out with other people," Warren said. "I'm still trying to stay away from people though." Staying away was difficult. The crowd was densely packed, albeit split into two side sections with a central dance floor. Social distancing grew increasingly difficult closer to the stage.

About half of those in attendance wore masks even with a county vaccination rate of 82% fully vaccinated, according to the New Mexico Department of Health. Ninety-nine percent have gotten at least one shot. Fully vaccinated individuals are no longer required to wear masks after the governor updated mask guidance two months ago.

Angie Livingston, of Churchrock, had some of the same health concerns as Warren. Livingston was also wearing a mask and sitting away from the crowd.

"It's my first time being out again," Livingston said. "I'm trying to be safe, keeping away and keeping social distance." Livingston set up her family's chairs at the far end of the concert next to Shi'Ma Traders. Only a few people sat near them and even then they were still about 6 feet apart. Despite some lingering anxiety, Livingston said it was worth it to spend time with her family in a different environment.

"There's not much going on at home, so just being out with my family is really nice," Livingston said.

Most of the audience seemed to agree. By the time the band's third song was over, the first few people began dancing.

dancing in the sun.

"I've been able to speak to a few local businesses who were open at the time and they said that they had folks come in and stop at their businesses," Smith said. "That's totally the goal of the event so that's really good news." Camille's Sidewalk Cafe, Sammy C's Rock N' Sports Pub & Grille, Coal Street Pub and Gallup Coffee Company all participated. Some even had their own special events and promotions.

Camille's hosted an open mic night after the concert that drew some of the event's stragglers in for poetry and a hot cup of coffee. Other businesses, like Coal Street Pub, had specials on food to lure hungry people inside.

"Downtown Night Out is really about supporting the local business community," Smith said. "It's about getting people to come downtown and seek out entertainment and eat and drink, locally."

### Looking to the future

With the success of this month's Downtown Night Out, Gallup MainStreet is already looking ahead. While the event was held monthly pre-pandemic, Smith said they will likely make the event a quarterly tradition with the next one held in fall.

"We're leaning toward quarterly," Smith said. "Monthly seemed a little too often when we were doing it before. It took a lot out of the businesses." With a move toward quarterly, Gallup MainStreet can also better program the event to persuade people to come downtown, Smith said. One option is theming the event to the season, something Smith said she is in favor of.

"Absolutely!" Smith said when asked if there were serious talks about seasonal theming for events like Halloween.

Gallup MainStreet's next big event is the Levitt AMP Gallup Music Series from Aug. 12 through Sept. 23. Live concerts will take place every Thursday at El Morro Theatre. There will be limited in-person tickets with the event simultaneously being

## Celebrating after tumultuous year

Despite a slow start, the anxious energy quickly dissipated as more and more people began to dance. By the end of the concert, the energy was electric. The once sparse dance floor was full of people dancing two-steps and slides.

Livingston, who brought her dance-loving mom and aunt, said she heard about the event from a friend on the social media app Snapchat. When she learned more about Downtown Night Out, Livingston said she knew she had to take her family.

"I brought them down because they love to watch slide dance," Livingston said. "It (the event) feels good. It's a nice evening to just be watching people enjoy themselves." Diná© Boyz lead singer Tyler Jones said seeing people enjoy themselves was the best part of the evening.

"Once the energy kicks in, we start getting into it," Jones said. "To see people dancing is what makes us happy because deep down you want to see people having a good time." Jones also said it was special for the family run band to be

livestreamed on Facebook and Youtube.

For more information, or to suggest ideas on Downtown Night Out or other future events, visit Gallup Main-Street's Facebook page or email Kara Smith at [director@gallupmainstreet.org](mailto:director@gallupmainstreet.org).



Community members dance during a performance by the Diná© Boyz at the Coal Street Commons in Gallup Saturday during the first in-person Downtown Night Out since June 2020.

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