

Corpus Christi could be Artscape's biggest jewel

When the 2008 Artscape was completed, an exhausted Father Richard J. Bozzelli and Betsy Lafferty relaxed in the front room of Corpus Christi's rectory.

The pastor of the Baltimore City parish and his pastoral associate barely had enough energy to stand after three days of hosting organ concerts and giving tours of their church, yet they had the same thought.

"What can we do next year?"

As the 2009 edition of the arts festival in Baltimore City's Mount Vernon district approaches, the duo has their answer.

The parish's church will host their annual organ concerts, plus three different opera groups July 17-19.

"It's very big for us," said Lafferty.

The Artscape Web site calls it the largest free public arts festival in the U.S., and it draws more than 150 artists, fashion designers and crafts people.

Art exhibits, concerts and vendors abound at the festival attended by thousands.

Located at 110 W. Lafayette St., Corpus Christi's church fits right in with Artscape.

"The church itself is a work of art," Father Bozzelli said.

Mosaics adorn the decorated, Gothic-style church from the floor to the ceiling. The recurring theme of the church is wheat and wine, and that can be seen in nearly every aspect of the church from the stained-glass windows to the altar.

Although some regulars might shy away from the large crowds visiting the neighborhood, Corpus Christi revels in the weekend.

"Almost every year we'll pick up new parishioners because of Artscape," Father

Bozzelli said. "What I stress is to have people here to meet others to show this is a friendly, warm place. It's the best free advertising our parish could ask for."

Many parishioners have told Father Bozzelli that Artscape initially attracted them to the parish. The church will once again provide tours of the church, which have proven popular in past years.

Father Bozzelli said 2005 renovations to Corpus Christi have resulted in incredible sound presentation.

"The acoustics in the building are stunning," he said.

While the various organ and opera concerts may place a large role during the weekend, the church will maintain its focus as a place of worship.

The regular Saturday 4 p.m. Mass will be held between performances. The Sunday 10:30 a.m. will be celebrated as usual.

"We're really looking forward to Artscape," Lafferty said. "The people are really excited and Artscape is happy. One of the things we always like to show is that we're a vibrant, alive church."

ARTSCAPE SCHEDULE AT CORPUS CRISTI

July 17

5:45 p.m.: Baltimore Concert Opera- The Lifer and Music of Maria Callas

July 18

1 and 3:15 p.m.: Organ concert

2 and 5:30 p.m.: Opera Vivente - I Hear America Singing: A Musical Celebration of the American Spirit

July 19

1 and 3:30 p.m.: Organ concert

2 and 5 p.m.: American Opera Theater – A Pilgrim’s Solace