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Friends of Rec Park Bandshell releases stacked 2024 performance lineup



BY SAMANTHA DIAZ, MANAGING EDITOR · APRIL 16, 2024 · 4 MINUTE READ · NO COMMENT

The nonprofit continues to rely on community partnerships to restore the historical Long Beach landmark.

Two years ago, longtime friends and music fans Steve Pruitt and Hans Hellsund created a nonprofit to revitalize one of Long Beach's abandoned historical landmarks: the bandshell at Recreation Park.

The bandshell has a colorful history, hosting bands, actors, students and even former president Richard Nixon in its heyday. Equipped with fond memories of the bandshell and plenty of determination, Pruitt and Hellsund created the Friends of Recreation Park Bandshell (FORPBS) in 2022.

The duo has hosted multiple events at the bandshell since then, inviting residents to the outdoor amphitheater to enjoy music and movies from local students and musicians. This year they've tripled the number of performances at the bandshell, with headliners such as Shakespeare by the Sea, the Long Beach Bluegrass Festival and the second annual high school battle of the bands.



Steve Pruitt (left) and Hans Hellsund of the Friends of Recreation Park Bandshell pose for a picture while sitting on the edge of the nearly 100-year-old stage on June 12, 2023. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

FORPBS' success can be linked to its community partnerships, Pruitt said. Organizations such as LB Gives, Long Beach Camerata Singers, Long Beach State Athletics, KJazz and others will take to the historic bandshell this spring and summer.

The nonprofit's goal to renovate the stage, benches and building has been slowly making progress, as they were finally able to get the sprawling green benches repaired and repainted recently. In May, the group will gain access to the inside of the attached building, which they haven't been able to use thus far.

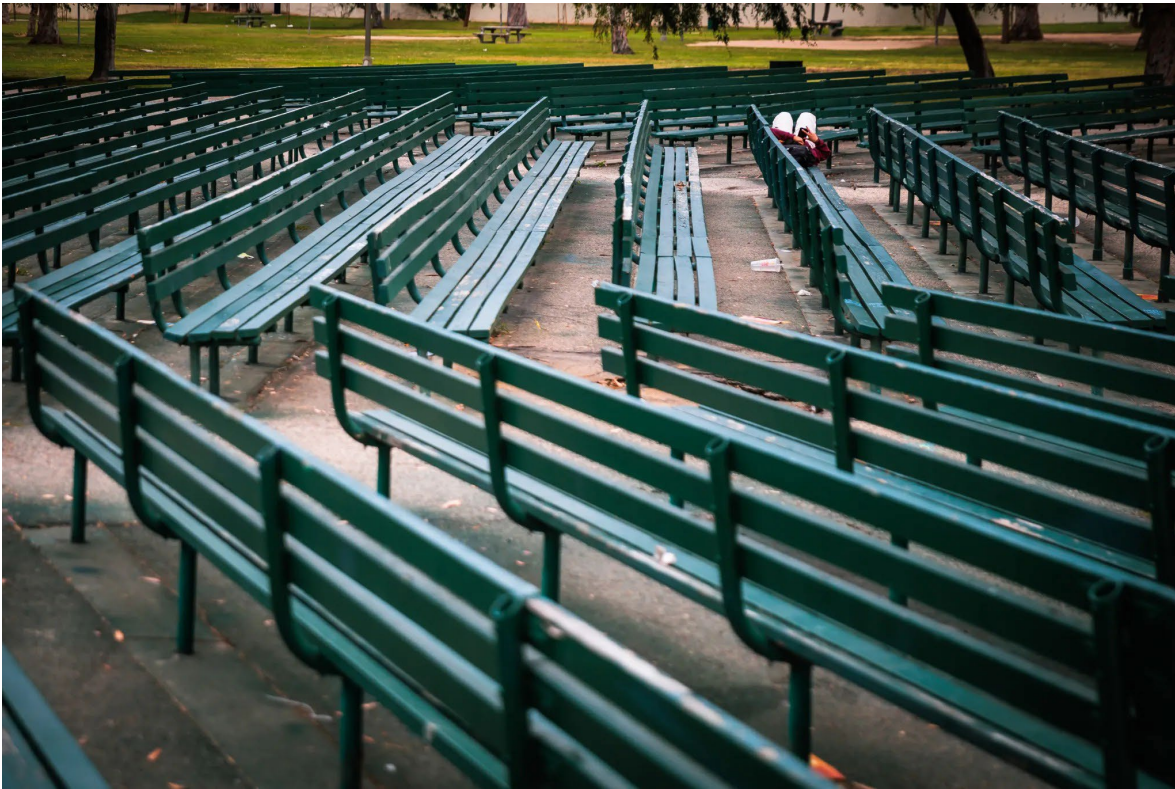
"That's really going to be a game-changer for us," Pruitt said, since they will now have a place to store equipment rather than lugging it from their homes to the bandshell for each event.

Pruitt said their goal for the year is to partner with as many local organizations as possible. FORPBS also has plans to become a "performance area" for local musicians and nonprofits to use the stage and building for rehearsals, with hopes of activating the area with creative energy.

"We've had a lot of nonprofit groups and also retired musicians and other bands just really begging for rehearsal space, and it's really hard to come by," Pruitt said. "We'd be happy to be that resource, we have all the equipment and the inside area that can be a rehearsal space."



A view of the facade of the Recreation Park Bandshell in Long Beach on June 12, 2023. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)



A woman lays on one of the benches at the Recreation Park Bandshell and browses on her phone on June 12, 2023. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

While Mayor Rex Richardson has excitedly announced plans to build a musical amphitheater near the Queen Mary, the City has been slow to support FORPBS' efforts to restore the already existing bandshell.

"My opinion is they ought to leverage a facility like this that they already have, and the money to update it is a small fraction of trying to build something new," Pruitt said, adding that estimates they've received to update the Recreation Park Bandshell have been around \$1 or \$2 million depending on the "scope" of updates they want to undertake.

The Long Beach Navy Memorial Heritage Foundation recently granted FORPBS its largest gift yet, with \$50,000 that will be used to renovate the stage later this year. The Port of Long Beach granted \$8,000 in support and councilmember Kristina Duggan's office allocated \$5,000 to FORPBS.

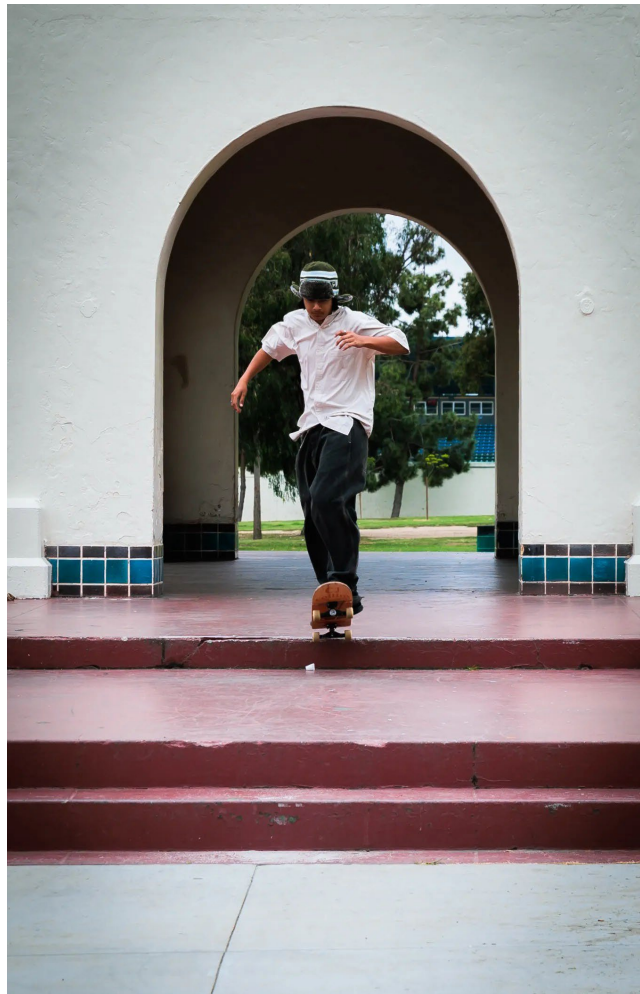
A growing community enthusiasm for the bandshell has resulted in a stacked lineup of varied performances throughout the year.

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A skateboarder jumps down the stairs of the Recreation Park Bandshell on June 12, 2023. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Residents can enjoy a concert under the sun this Saturday before the Long Beach State Dirtbags baseball game at Blair Field, which sits within walking distance of the bandshell. Music will be performed by Higher Ed, a band of local professors as well as a dean of one of the local colleges.

Pruitt is expecting the May 4 Bluegrass Festival to draw at least 1,000 SoCal music enthusiasts to Recreation Park, spread out listening to performances or forming their own music circles. The bandshell will also host LB Gives, an online fundraiser drive to benefit nearly 300 nonprofits in the city, in its only in-person event of the year.

All the nonprofits taking part in LB Gives will gather at the bandshell on Sept. 15 for music, dancing and a celebration of local activism.

The full 2024 schedule for Friends of the Recreation Park Bandshell is below:

April

- Saturday, April 20 from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.: Pre-Dirtbags Baseball Game Concert with Higher Ed

May

- Saturday, May 4: Long Beach Bluegrass Festival, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

June

- Sunday, June 2: High School Battle of the Bands, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Thursday through Friday, June 20 to 22: Shakespeare by the Sea performing "Cardenio" from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- Sunday, June 23: Long Beach Camerata Singers, "A Sondheim Tribute Revue" from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Friday and Saturday, June 28 and 29: Shakespeare by the Sea performing "Henry IV" from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- Sunday, June 30: KJAZZ Bubba Jackson Memorial Concert from noon to 8 p.m.

July

- Saturday, July 13: 7 Saturdays of Summer - performance TBD from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday, Jul 20: 7 Saturdays of Summer - Manuel the Band from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday, Jul 27: 7 Saturdays of Summer - performance TBD from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

August

- Saturday, Aug. 3: 7 Saturdays of Summer - Long Beach Camerata Singers, Music of Laurel Canyon from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Aug. 10: 7 Saturdays of Summer - King Salmon from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday, Aug. 17: 7 Saturdays of Summer - performance TBD from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday, Aug. 24: 7 Saturdays of Summer - Knyght Ryder from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

September

- Saturday, Sept. 7: Tribute Band Festival, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Sunday, Sep 15: LB Gives Fair & Concert from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

October

- Saturday, Oct. 19: Jazz at the Shell from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.