

Arts

Good 'Vibes' Are Coming To Bridgeport

This July, the Gathering of the Vibes music and arts festival returns to Seaside Park.

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For Ken Hays, the music never stopped.

And for residents of Fairfield County and beyond, Hays' love of song and craft alike brings joy to more than 20,000 people each summer. Since 1996, Hays, a Weston resident, has organized the Gathering of the Vibes, a weekend-long music and arts festival held this year at Bridgeport's Seaside Park.

The festival was founded to celebrate the life of legendary Grateful Dead guitarist and singer Jerry Garcia, who passed away in 1995.

The first incarnation of the Vibes — Deadhead Heaven — was held at SUNY Purchase and since then, the festival has bounced back and forth between Connecticut and New York.

Up through at least next summer, the festival will remain in Bridgeport. Hays said the venue itself, Seaside Park, nestled on two-and-a-half miles of Long Island Sound coastline, is "one of the most beautiful" he's ever seen.

In 1875, Hays said, P.T. Barnum, then mayor of Bridgeport, donated his own property to the city "so that it could be used for recreational activities." That property is now Seaside Park.

"We're thrilled to be returning to Seaside Park for our 16th annual Gathering of the Vibes," Hays said. "Last year, we had thousands of residents of Fairfield County and New Haven County and residents of Hartford that came to the Vibes for the first time."

Hays said he's been amazed at and very thankful for the success the Vibes has had.

After Deadhead Heaven, "not in a million years did I think, 16 years later, I'd be throwing festivals and working with some of my musical idols," said Hays, who followed the Dead across the country before Garcia passed away. "It's been an incredible ride and I'm very appreciative of those who've supported the Vibes over the years and allow myself and my friends to do what we love doing."

And Hays does indeed work with his musical idols.

Performing at this year's festival, which is scheduled to run from July 21 through July 24, are Furthur, lead by the Grateful Dead's singer and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir and bassist Phil Lesh, and the Rhythm Devils, Dead-drummers Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart's project.

In addition to those acts, the festival's initial lineup includes Jane's Addiction, Elvis Costello & The Imposters, the John Butler Trio, moe., The Levon Helm Band, Toots & The Maytals, the Taj Mahal Trio and Connecticut's own Deep Banana Blackout, a band that's become a staple at the Vibes.

"I [was] more excited to announce this year's lineup than any other year. We've got incredible diversity within musical genres," something of which Garcia was particularly fond.

More bands will be announced in the coming weeks, and a full lineup and schedule will be available at govibes.com (<http://govibes.com>).

"We really try to hit upon all the musical components whether it be jazz or funk or folk, bluegrass, even a little electronica," Hays said. "It's all-encompassing. It's tough to put your finger on the pulse of the Vibes musically. I feel like we've covered the spectrum beautifully."

Hays said so far this year, ticket sales have been solid.

"Based on where we were last year at this time and where we are now, we're going to have an amazing weekend on the shores of Long Island Sound," he said.

There are a variety of ticketing options available for those who wish to attend, ranging from a Thursday through Sunday camping pass for \$205 to a VIP weekend pass for \$420 to single day tickets for \$75 (no camping) and everything in between.

A new ticketing option is available this year: a single-day VIP ticket (\$125-\$150), for those "who don't want to camp and don't want to take the risk of being on the concert field if it's raining. We've got a beautiful VIP tent and viewing area. Come for the day, have lunch. It's a nice spread."

(Full ticketing information is available [here](http://tickets.gatheringofthevibes.com/events/135674) (<http://tickets.gatheringofthevibes.com/events/135674>).

"Last year, we had about 1,500 or so Bridgeport residents come down to Seaside Park and we offered them a three-day pass, no camping and no Thursday entrance, because that's only for campers, for \$75," Hays said, adding the same deal applies this year. "All day Friday and Saturday and Sunday. We're offering that as a token of our appreciation for Bridgeport residents for allowing us to take over residency in the park."

The Vibes also offers something for the little ones — and the teenagers, too.

"Last year, we had 2,000 kids come with the parents," Hays said. "It was huge, it was beautiful. So we've expanded our Kids Corner and Teen Scene, and we now have a stage dedicated for incredibly musically talented teenagers."

There, Hays said, kiosks will be set up so kids who are interested in learning how to run a lighting board or a sound board can do so from the engineers who do that for a living.

"We figured it'd be cool to let the kids know what it takes to run a show behind the scenes," Hays said.

On the festival's website, there's a clock counting down until the Vibes begins. Here comes sunshine.

“We’re ready to rock,” Hays said.



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