

FusionFest 2019

Two-day festival celebrates Orlando's diversity, inclusion, collaboration and innovation.

FusionFest returns to downtown Orlando on Thanksgiving weekend in celebration of Central Florida's increasingly diverse community of people who enrich each other's lives with different cultures and languages. In its second year, the festival features music, dance, spoken word, fashion, food, a game station and a visual arts gallery showcasing the diverse cultures and heritage of those who call the Orlando area home.

Terry Olson, Orange County Arts & Cultural Affairs Director, says, "We think

this is the time and the place to show the world that people with different lifestyles and different ethnicities, heritages, can live together in a non-divisive way."

Research published by the Orlando Economic Partnership states that by 2030 Orlando will be the most diverse city in the world. People of the world love Orlando and are settling here, adding colors, tastes, aromas, sights and sounds to the City Beautiful. The identity of Orlando is being shaped by diversity and how the community embraces it.

Under the leadership of Olson, a grassroots movement formed in 2016 to start exploring what it would look like if all of the different heritage and cultural festivals came together in one event. It became clear that when people from different cultures collaborate on a project, fusing elements and ideas, they become more creative and innovative. FusionFest was born.

A Festival Was Born

After two years of planning, FusionFest received support from Orange County Government, City of Orlando and several sponsors that believed in the idea of fostering inclusion, collaboration and innovation through performing arts, food, drink, human interaction and film. In its first year, some 8,000 people enjoyed a weekend filled with music, dance, art, literature, fashion, culture and fun. Performers, vendors and volunteers from more than 100 heritages shared their talents throughout the festival. Not only did the festival garner the Award of Excellence at the Golden Brick Awards hosted by the Downtown Orlando Partnership in March, but it also received first place in Community Outreach Program from the Florida Festivals and Events Association in August.

During this year's event, festival-goers can also take in screenings of more than 20 short films shown on a continuous loop at the FusionFest Film Pavilion in City Hall in partnership with the Global Peace Film Festival (GFFF). The films are the result of the FusionFest "MYgration" Film Contest that kicked off the end of August. Filmmakers were paired with participants hailing from countries around the world to create films that capture portraits of the participants' heritage, the reasons for their move to Central



Dance displays of cultural creativity



Beautiful costumes and imaginative style



Fashion statements from around the globe

COURTESY FUSIONFEST—STEPHEN SHELDON (ALL)



Colors flying during FusionFest 2018 in downtown Orlando, where participants celebrated diversity, inclusion and a spirit of unity.

What: FusionFest
When: Nov. 30-Dec. 1
Time: Saturday, 12-9 p.m.
 & Sunday, 12-6 p.m.
Where: Seneff Arts Plaza, Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts & Orlando City Hall Commons Plaza
Cost: Free
Website: fusionfest.org
Contact: hello@fusionfest.org



Guests discover a variety of foods from various world cultures.

Florida and how they have become integrated into the community, among other things. Countries represented include Guyana, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Northern Ireland, Peru, Russia, South Africa and Uzbekistan. The films were subsequently screened at the GPF in September. "MYgration" culminates at FusionFest on Sunday, when a grand prize award of \$1,000 will be presented to the filmmaker for the film voted the best by a FusionFest panel of judges.

Olson invites the community to "come share a smile and your heritage — you may discover just how different other people really aren't. You can be you here." **OAM**



A rainbow of dazzling color decorates the streets of Orlando.