First-ever S’mores on the Square event brings hundreds to downtown Evanston

Shun Graves, Assistant City Editor

Evanston resident Danielle DeCamp bills herself an expert on s’mores. So, the moment she saw a poster advertising Evanston’s first-ever S’mores on the Square, she knew she had to go.

“I love s’mores,” DeCamp said. “Some people add all this other stuff, but (I love) just the classic marshmallow and chocolate.”

Hundreds of people roasted marshmallows over four fire pits Saturday in Fountain Square to create their own classic s’mores. The event, hosted by Downtown Evanston and the city’s Parks and Recreation Department, drew plenty of foot traffic to a district still grappling with office and retail vacancies.

A local Girl Scouts troop helped the district prepare 600 kits that contained marshmallows, chocolate, graham crackers and a napkin. Participants also received wooden sticks they could roast their campfire creations with.

Though Downtown Evanston doled out kits to anybody who came, early registration slots filled up more than a week ago, according to Andy Vick, the district’s executive director.

“This is a great crowd,” he added. “We’re seeing all kinds of people: young folks, old folks, families, NU students. It’s really just a great opportunity to come out and enjoy downtown on a beautiful February night.”

Downtown Evanston has grappled with empty storefronts and vacant office space for nearly four years — since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the district has prioritized events that would attract more foot traffic.

Vick said the idea for S’mores on the Square arose when he helped brainstorm programming that would help visitors warm up during the winter. The flame-roasted sweets would also encourage more people to frequent downtown, he added.

“That’s the not-so-hidden agenda here,” Vick said. “We want to expose people to downtown and to our businesses.”

Michael Greenstone came to S’mores on the Square with his wife and their 3-year-old daughter. He said the event was great for his daughter, Ariel, who spent the entire day excited for the sweet treats.
They planned to eat a hearty meal afterward.

“We are going to have dinner downtown after this,” Greenstone said. “We probably wouldn’t have done that without this event.”

Downtown Evanston paid for the kits and roasting materials, and the city set up the fire pits. The district will again host S’mores on the Square on March 9.

Amanda D’Agostino, the city’s special events coordinator, lauded Saturday’s “great turnout.” It helped that the weather warmed up ahead of S’mores on the Square, she said.

“Getting people down here in the middle of the winter can be a little difficult,” she said. “We thought that a s’mores event — a free event — would help bring people down here.”

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