Heroes and Villains: Teen Dance @ the Riverwalk

Naperville Public Library

Young Adult

Heroes and Villains: Teen Dance @ the Riverwalk

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$251-500

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Byline

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This event is an annual summer reading program kick-off dance for teens hosted at the outdoor Riverwalk Amphitheater across the street from the Nichols Library. A DJ provides music, takes requests and leads group dances. The name of the dance changes each year based on the summer reading program theme.

Advanced Planning

The goal of the annual dance is to generate excitement about the summer reading program, to host a fun event for teens, and to increase the library's visibility in the community.

The three teen librarians started planning about six months in advance. We have found that participation is best on Friday nights, and we like to offer the dance during the evening. This year we had it from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., starting the dance while it was still light out and ending after the sun set.

We booked the Riverwalk Amphitheater with the park district and also scheduled a room in the library as a rain-out location. Once the venue was secured, our library's marketing department booked a DJ, and we ordered glow necklaces to hand out at the dance.

Finally, we worked with the teen advisory groups to brainstorm possible names for the dance. This year's theme for the reading program was "Every Hero Has A Story," and as a result, the TAGTeam chose to call the event Heroes and Villains: Teen Dance @ The Riverwalk. They hoped it would help encourage teens to come in costume.

Marketing

This event was promoted in a variety of ways. Since the TAGTeam was involved in the initial planning stages, they had a vested interest in the event. They did a good job of getting the word out to their friends. The teen librarians also talked it up during our annual end-of-the-year school visits, where we plug our reading program and summer events.

We also promoted the dance on social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram, on our website, and with fliers posted throughout the library. During the actual event, we posted a sign at the entrance of the amphitheater identifying the dance as a library-sponsored program. The best form of promotion was simply having the

dance outside; the music drew in teens who were hanging out in downtown Naperville or casually walking by.

Budgeting

The biggest cost for this program was the DJ, which ended up being about $300 with the discount they offered us. Some years, we have received a Naperville Special Events and Cultural Amenities Fund (SECA) grant that has covered this cost, but this year’s dance was not funded by the grant. I believe the DJ was key to the event's success, as he gauged the mood of the audience and kept the energy level high. The DJ also knew which songs were popular with teens and played songs they were excited about.

We are lucky that the park district waived the fee for the Riverwalk Amphitheater, so we did not have to pay for the venue. We also purchased about 100 glow sticks for $75 and put out some lemonade, snacks and candy. This brought the total cost to between $400 and $500. Offering water and eliminating the snacks and glow sticks would bring down the cost.

Day-of-event Activity

To set up, we brought out two tables (one for the DJ and one for library fliers and snacks), an extension cord for the DJ, a sign announcing the event and a garbage can. Five staff members ran the dance: three teen librarians, one supervisor and one library monitor. We had originally wanted to sign up teens for the summer reading program, but the Wi-Fi didn’t work that far away from the library. Instead, we handed out reading logs and program information.

Our major challenge was the weather! The week of the dance, we discovered that there was a 100 percent chance of thunderstorms predicated on the day of the dance. While we could have moved the dance to the library, it is more fun to have the dance outside because it increases the visibility of the event. Luckily, our marketing team was able to reschedule the DJ.

Also, be aware that you may run into potential conflicts with other musical events

going on in the area. Luckily, for us, these events were all far enough away that you could not hear them from our party.

Program Execution

Over 1,000 people came to the dance over the course of the evening, making it a huge success! While the dance was targeted at teens in grades 6 to 12, people of all ages ended up joining in since it was held in a public place with high pedestrian traffic. Teens were still the core participants, and as it got later into the evening they had the dance floor to themselves when everyone else headed home. The teens particularly enjoyed the group dances and loved being able to request their favorite songs. And a number of them came in a superhero or villain costume!

We found that, after showing off their dance moves, people of all ages approached us with quizzical looks on their faces to ask us what the dance was all about. This gave us an opportunity to talk about the summer reading program and to encourage people to sign up. It also opened a dialogue about other events we host and resources we offer to the community.

All in all, we achieved our goals of hosting a fun event that teens (and teens at heart) look forward to each year!

Advice

We are lucky to have a venue across the street from the library, which works out perfectly for our event. Not all libraries have an outdoor amphitheater that they can use, but they may have another unique location. Think creatively about your library and community to determine a location that works best for you.

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Supporting Materials

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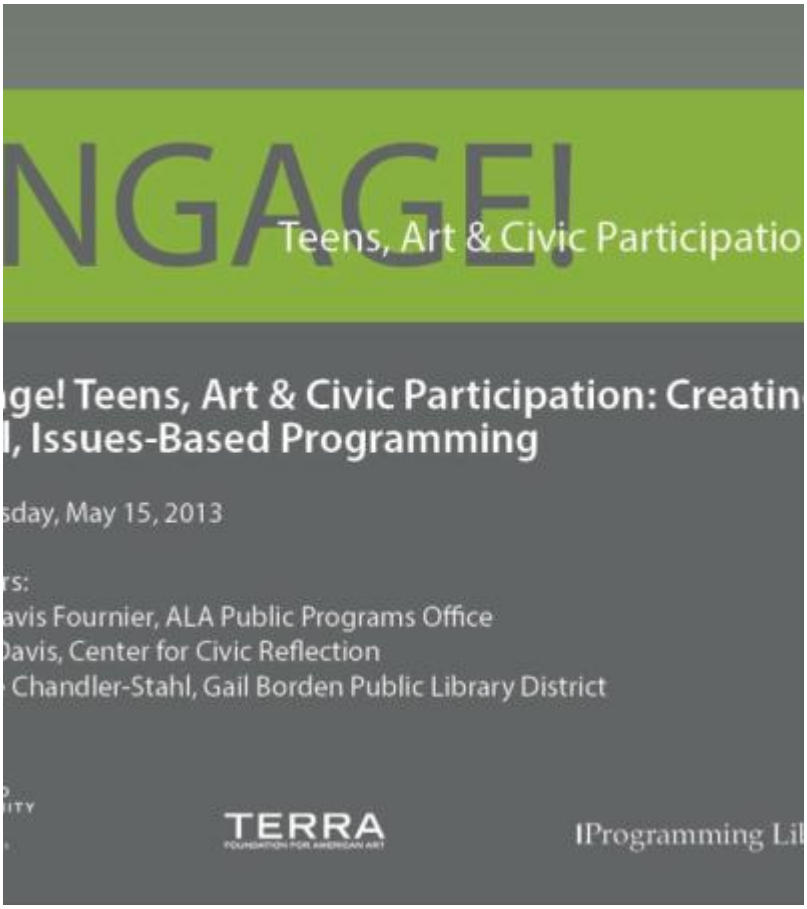

Engage! Teens, Art & Civic Participation: Creating Local, Issues-Based Programming

Audiences: