

Flugtag Launched Fun In Downtown!

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Who knew Tampa would tip over Red Bull Flugtag?

But tip it did, with more than 100,000 people crowding into downtown to watch competitors launch homemade aircraft off a ramp into the Hillsborough River near the Convention Center.

Though traffic was tied up for miles around, Flugtag, which means "flying day," created a buzz that put downtown Tampa on the map this past weekend. And that's a good thing.

Consider that Tampa is one of just three American cities that will host the event this year. The others are Chicago and Portland, both good company.

There were snags, of course, since the crowd was twice as large as expected. People complained about the traffic, long lines for trolley service, a shortage of parking and some rowdies in the crowd. Thankfully, Red Bull paid the full tab for police services.

Still, downtown had no rolled-up sidewalks. The place was buzzing with young "creative class" people, just the demographic the city hopes to attract.

Similarly, in May crowds lined the Hillsborough River to watch the International Dragon Boat Races. Coupled with Asia Fest at the St. Pete Times Forum, the day celebrated diversity and created another way for people to interact with the river.

These events show there's a hunger for downtown events, especially those that embrace the river. Though we can hardly wait for the new Curtis Hixon Park, Riverwalk, Glazer Children's Museum, Tampa Bay History Center and Tampa Museum of Art, it takes more than great facilities to create a buzz. You need strong programming and events that appeal to a wide range of people.

Given that, planners should consider moving the Friday Night Concert Series from Lowry Park Zoo to downtown once the park along Ashley Drive is complete.

And they should move the July 4 fireworks display from the Channel District back to Bayshore Boulevard, where more families can access and enjoy the show. Parking shortages and traffic tie-ups in the Channel District ruined the festive mood for some this year.

But kudos to the Tampa City Council for continuing its support for Lights on Tampa, the lighted public-art display that drew international acclaim for the city in 2006. The next display will coincide with Super Bowl XLIII and Gasparilla.

Tampa has shown naysayers that people will travel downtown for events worth attending.

The challenge is to give them more and better reasons to do so.

What's next?

