

Bonita Springs National Art Festival ranked # 4 in the Nation by "Sunshine Artist Magazine" Sept., 2007 issue

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4 Bonita Springs National Art Festival

Bonita Springs, Florida: January. Produced by Art League of Bonita Springs.

The #2 Florida show is fast becoming a permanent fixture near the top of our list. Up one spot from last year, the January version of the Festival drew raves again in 2006. And when artists weren't bragging about sales, they were thanking veteran promoter Barry Witt for his attention to detail, easy setup procedures and insistence on allowing only top-quality art.

One reason for the show's continued success is its location, the parking lot of an upscale shopping center. It's simply in the right place at the right time and manages to draw those most valued of Florida patrons: the snowbirds. And Witt seems to know what type of event those birds flock to: "This is an art show," he says — "no music and very limited food."

The Festival charges a \$3 entrance fee, but not many patrons seem to mind because the money helps support the Art League. Also not drawing too many complaints this year were the high winds on Friday, mostly because Witt warned all his exhibitors and even passed out

screws that artists could use to anchor their booths into the pavement. Although a few tents were damaged, not many of the 200 artists left the show unhappy — or without a healthy profit in their pockets.



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Bonita Springs, Florida: March. Produced by Art League of Bonita Springs.

Promoter Barry Witt has two shows in the top 25 again this year. The March version of his Bonita show, which is younger sibling of the January event (#4) at the same location, is creeping ever closer to the top 10, up from #17 last year and #38 the year before. And it's little surprise, as both shows enjoy the same great organization, advertising and attendance. The buying frenzy is just slightly less intense at the March Festival.

Although exhibitor parking is a distance away from the show site, Witt provides a shuttle. He also arranges for special exhibitor rates at a fabulous four-star hotel, the nearby Trianon. Other plusses include ample back storage, reasonable show hours, and conveniently

located restaurants and boutiques. Some exhibitors do think amenities (coffee and pastry) are a bit light, but the show offers \$3,000 in awards, and Witt's strict jurying ensures that the quality of the artwork is topnotch.

Witt, who runs the event for the Art League, receives praise for his strict, but fair, policies. As SA's Donna Wilson says, "Witt is a joy to work with. He treats us like professionals, expects us to behave ourselves and know the rules, and always has a smile on his face. However, don't be fooled — he'll be on you in a heartbeat if you do something inappropriate, and he shows no favorites." It's that treatment, plus the 30,000 or so art-savvy attendees, that make competition for the 200 spaces so fierce.