

# The Pawtucket Arts Festival Celebrates the Past, Present and Future of the City

With the mechanized spin of a mill 225 years ago, Pawtucket earned its place as a revolutionary landmark. This year, the Pawtucket Arts Festival — now in its 20th year — reminds us why the city along the Blackstone River remains integral to the state's fabric, and how Pawtucket continues to evolve.

Unlike PVD Fest, which curates its programming to fit a weekend and a downtown footprint, the Pawtucket Arts Festival (PAF) runs the entire month of September, across multiple sites. More than 30 events include activities ranging from pop-up skate parks to art exhibits featuring the work of veterans to a major collaboration between Shea High School's Fashion Club and TEN31's Metamorphosis Dance Company.

"It's very participatory in terms of how the festival is created, with so many partners," says PAF director Jennifer Dalton Vincent. "Vital, interesting orgs like Mixed Magic Theater, Slater Mill or RHD RI (to name a few) plan events, hosted in their venues, that speak to their specific audience — and also bring in people who are new to their work, and to the Arts Festival. It's very bottoms up in its creation. It's a citywide collaborative effort."

As part of an effort to usher the festival out of its teenage years and examine a content mix that's both multigenerational and multicultural, Dalton Vincent hopes that a newly revamped, music-centric event will become a cornerstone of PAF in years to come. Downtown Rising, on Saturday, September 22, is meant to demonstrate a "decades by design" look back and look ahead at Pawtucket's arts community, according to a news release.

So what's this mean for festival-goers?

"Downtown Rising is a music festival happening downtown at East Ave and Main Street," Dalton Vincent says. "It's a combination of three stages: the folk River Bend Stage, Rocktucket, which is programmed by the News Cafe, and a third stage, programmed by Chachi Carvalho, the Culture Shock Block Party." Organizers hope that the Culture Shock Block Party, in particular, will serve as both a city-wide family reunion and an excuse to "get to know your neighbor." Performers on the Culture Shock Block Party Stage include Cadillac Jack, Harmony Band and M.A.K.U. Soundsystem, among others.

In addition to programming the stage, Carvalho sits on the board of directors for the Arts Festival. Dalton Vincent notes that, as the festival seeks to become truly representative of "the people who call Pawtucket home," this has included welcoming new members to the board in recent years.

"What makes the Pawtucket Arts Festival unique is that it's a partnership with the city, the board and about 30 arts and culture organizations and educational outfits in the city of Pawtucket," Dalton Vincent says. "The lion's share of money that allows the festival to happen each year is contributed from within the community of Pawtucket. It's such a civic gem held by them, fed by them, nourished by them, made possible by them."

Many events are free or low-cost with a suggested donation. While activities are sprinkled throughout

the week, the best way to make a day of PAF is to center your trip around three Saturdays: September 8, September 15 and September 22.

### **September 8**

Your opportunity to check out PAF flagships: the Slater Park Fall Festival (running all weekend) and the Chinese Dragon Boat Races & Taiwan Day Festival (Saturday only; come for the races ([motifri.com/dragon-boats-in-our-midst](http://motifri.com/dragon-boats-in-our-midst)), stay for the dumpling contest). The Fall Fest also includes Collective PVD's skate pop-up, silkscreening, music, vendors and the RI Philharmonic Pops in the Park. (The free Pops performance comes courtesy of PAF's major sponsor, the Pawtucket Teachers' Alliance.) End the night with post-Pops fireworks.

### **September 15**

McCoy hosts their 2nd annual PawSox Food Truck and Craft Beer Festival. You can also check out the Jacqueline M. Walsh Performing & Visual Arts School's Family Arts Day (probably better to go pre-beer festival). A poetry festival in honor of Pawtucket poet Galway Kinnell also runs through the weekend, with workshops ranging from a focus on hip-hop to haikus.

### **September 22**

Spend the day at Downtown Rising. Beyond the three stages of talent, you'll find BMX stunt bikes, a beer garden, kid-friendly activities and food trucks. Make time for LIVING: The Arts in Pawtucket. The performance uses dance, fashion, music to showcase the stories of local artists through live vignette performance and brings together Shea High's Annual Fashion Show and the nationally-recognized minds at TEN31 (you've seen their living statues at WaterFire) and Metamorphosis Dance Company ([motifri.com/PAFfashion](http://motifri.com/PAFfashion)). Find them by the Culture Shock Block Party stage.

For full event listings, visit [pawtucketartsfestival.org](http://pawtucketartsfestival.org).