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Greenville & Hockessin L I F E

Magazine

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Since 1960, the Brandywine Arts Festival had been a traditional highlight of Autumn in Wilmington. Now, under new leadership and with a new name, the annual gathering celebrates its 50th year

The New Old Festival

By Richard L. Gaw
Correspondent

On the wall of Barry Schlecker's office in the Trolley Square section of Wilmington, there are two white boards, filled with names hastily written in red magic marker, easily erasable. The board to the right is marked "NFF" and its scrawl of to-dos and contact names is an inky testament to his continuing role as the executive director of the Newark Film Festival, now in the planning stages for its fifth season, which kicks off in late September. With the help of an army of volunteers, Schlecker has turned the Festival into a bona fide hit; what began as a concept to bring independent cinema to New Castle County has now become an annual rite of passage for hundreds of cinephiles.

The board next to it, of equal size, is named "BFA," which stands for Brandywine Festival of the Arts. It too is a litany of names and tasks that represent the future of a Delaware tradition begun 50 years ago in 1960, one that has been passed to him, one that says that he has become the new soul of an old machine.

In April, Schlecker was named as the executive director of the Brandywine Festival of the Arts (previously the Brandywine Arts Festival), which will be held September 11 and 12 in Brandywine Park, a two-day event that he hopes will infuse new traditions with long-established ones, while continuing to be the foremost place in Delaware to purchase quality, original pieces of art from painters, sculptors, weavers and



Photo by Richard Gaw

Barry Schlecker, the new producer of the Brandywine Festival of the Arts, which will draw 250 artists to Brandywine Park on September 11-12.

Brandywine Arts Festival

other craftspeople from all over the nation.

Perennially ranked in the top 100 shows of its kind in the country, the festival began in 1960 as a one-day event that featured two-dimensional art and a bull roast. By the 1970s, the festival began to draw visitors from up and down the Eastern seaboard and artists from as far away as California. For the first time in its history, the event was cancelled last year due to a financial dispute between festival organizers and the City of Wilmington. Former executive director Janie Branch attempted to relocate the festival to the former Walker's Farm in Hockessin, but was forced to cancel because of a lack of commitment from many artists. As a result, many artists lost their entry fee investment, as well as thousands of dollars in potential sales.

"I have gotten to know several local artists over the years, and I've appreciated how many of them have been able to make a living from their art," said Schlecker, an art collector and board member at the Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts in Wilmington. "In previous years, they had counted on the festival as a source of their income, so

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Right Photo: Barry Schlecker, rear, meets with Ed Weinrauch, the public relations agent for the Brandywine Festival of the Arts, to discuss the layout of the festival, which will be held September 11-12 at Brandywine Park.

