

2018 Viva Portugal: an outdoor street party to celebrate Portuguese culture!

By Sean McCarthy

A few years ago a local business luncheon produced a winning idea – The Portuguese know how to throw a party so let's do it like it hasn't been done before.

And so "Viva Portugal" was launched.

This Saturday, May 5th, downtown New Bedford will be enlivened with the third annual celebration of "Viva Portugal," a free four-block festival providing guests with the opportunity to indulge in the culture of a people whose influence on the region is like no other ethnic group.

And while Portuguese celebrations are proven commodities in the South Coast, the uniqueness of "Viva Portugal" is that it involves the contributions of a dozen local organizations devoted to Portuguese culture, coming together to create a wide spectrum of arts, food and entertainment.



Under the galvanizing direction of the Zeiterion Theatre, the local Portuguese community is being unified through its' diversity.

From 12:45 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. the streets surrounding the Zeiterion will teem with a something-for-everyone atmosphere that will range from adult beverages to children's play areas.

"The Portuguese still champion their cultural richness," says Rosemary Gill, Co-Director at the Zeiterion. "This event shows what a strong social fabric this community has – they've truly embraced this festival and we're proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them."

"The Zeiterion is giving the Portuguese community the opportunity to do something that's never been done in New Bedford," says Joe Sousa, a current member of the Board of Directors for the Club Madeirense S.S. Sacramento which runs the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, as well as the Chairman for the Committee that runs the Museum of Medeiran Heritage. "The Z is making cultural connections through the arts and entertainment."

Whether it's in "The Big Tent," on the outdoor stage, or in the streets, Viva Portugal is a lively and perpetual celebration, a family-friendly event which pays homage to a culture both classical and contemporary. The outdoor atmosphere will include a Portuguese marching band, folkloric dancers from the Discovery Language Academy, an orchestra of ukulele players, the comedy of the Portuguese Kids, fado singer Sofia Ribeiro and a Madeiran folkloric group.

"The Big Tent" will house the Portugala Marketplace of Fall River which will showcase their specialty grocery store and café, offering housewares, tiles, ceramics, olive oils, and pre-packaged foods. Simultaneously there will be cooking demonstrations with celebrity Portuguese chefs who will create dishes and provide samples, as well as doing book signings. Tagus Press, a publisher affiliated with UMass-Dartmouth's Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, will allow guests to browse copies of their books while Manuela DaCosta, born in Terceira, Azores who immigrated to New Bedford as a young

adult, will be doing readings from the book “Hawk Island.”



The streets of the event will feature floats devoted to different facets of Portuguese culture. The S.S. Brinquinho Float is a replica of Columbus’s Santa Maria will be on display along with a float dedicated to the traditional wine making of the island of Madeira, along with a float designed as a replica of Madeira itself. Other street sights will include the Santana House, provided by the Madeiran Feast, that is a replica of a small thatched triangular house found in the village of Santana or Madeira. There will also be a display of an Azorean Whaleboat presented by the Azorean Maritime Heritage Society. Whaleboat races will take place at 1:30 p.m., 3 p.m., and 4:30 p.m.

Another street treat will be the Three Cousins – a musical group which will be roaming the area playing traditional Portuguese music with two mandolins and an accordion.

“The Portuguese are very social and proud of their culture,” says Shelley Pires, Portuguese Consul to New Bedford. “We immensely enjoy sharing our heritage with others – it’s

ingrained in the way we behave and in the way we communicate with others. This is a part of our way of life. This is who we genuinely are, we're not pretending to have a good time. It's in our souls and hearts – it's something we want to share with others."

Lelise Vicente is the Director of the Discovery Language Academy. She spent her first 12 years living on Pico Island in the Azores. She would frequent block parties that were only walking distance from her home.

"Viva Portugal reminds me of the kind of street parties we would enjoy back in the Old Country," Vicente says. "There were these little festivals where people could hang out together. You could have something to eat or drink or partake in an activity. This is typical of smaller festivals in Portugal."

"The Portuguese people are happy to help with the Zeiterion's vision and work with other like-minded organizations," Sousa says. "We get to show off some of our culture and be a part of the community. When you get to work with people doing the same thing you learn to appreciate each other.

"This event is about bringing people together."

"The Z has made the Portuguese community stronger," Vicente says.

The planners of "Viva Portugal" knew from the beginning that the success of the event would depend on the involvement of all of the regional organizations devoted to Portuguese culture. They were pleased to discover the enthusiasm of these groups.



"Right out of the gate we knew we had something," Gill says. "These people know how to roll up their sleeves and get things done, they have strong connections and networks. Bringing these groups together has given us something greater than the sum of our parts."

And the parts were being put together when Gill met with Pedro Carneiro, then Consul for the Portuguese Consulate in New Bedford, along with Mike Tavares, then President of the Prince Henry Society and a current member of the Zeiterion's Board of Directors. Their conversation was about how the Zeiterion could take action to bring greater recognition to Portuguese culture in the city. The Zeiterion was scheduled to host a concert of Portuguese music, but there was the feeling that more could be done.

The gears began turning.

"Eventually we thought 'What if we did something really amazing that brought the community together in a deeper way than just a performance? What if we had a party in front of the 'Z'?' Gill says.

But they knew that the only way they could make it happen was to involve all of the Portuguese organizations in the community – something that had never been done in the region before.

“They loved the idea,” Gill says. “They welcomed the opportunity to do something together.”

And Viva Portugal will serve to further a burgeoning trend in local Portuguese pride. According to Vicente “it’s now cool to be Portuguese. It’s cool to have a second culture. They enjoy learning about things like dancing, food and music. They like learning about the lives of past generations. Learning the language is part of learning the culture.”

The school, located in the DeMello Center in downtown New Bedford, includes 150 students of all ages who learn how to speak Portuguese as well as being introduced to their culture. The organization introduces students to the celebration of Portuguese holidays along with customary American holidays.

Viva Portugal is one of seven Portuguese-oriented celebrations to be held in the region this summer, but is considered unique because of the fact that it has yet to be Americanized such as festivals that have been held in America for 50 to 100 years or more. Other festivals include the Day of Portugal (held in New Bedford and Fall River) in June, the Portuguese Festival in Provincetown in June, the internationally recognized Madeiran Feast in July, The Feast of the Holy Spirit in Fall River in August, and the Feast of the Holy Ghost in Westport in August.

All of the workers at Viva Portugal are volunteers.

“Nobody’s making any money but we’re having a great time doing it,” Sousa says.

“The Portuguese have shown that through the generations they still have a passion for their culture,” Gill says. “We’re

happy to throw a party with them.”