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How an Opening Event Brought a Crowd of 250,000 Off the Vegas Strip

With the large-scale, four-day opening festivities for the new Downtown Summerlin complex, the Las Vegas event scene is broadening its scope.



<http://www.bizbash.com/downtown-summerlin-opened-day-festival-drew-250000-people-how/gallery/153577>

Downtown Summerlin opened with a four-day festival that drew 250,000 people.

Photo: Jean Jacques Pochet

By *Alesandra Dubin* Posted November 17, 2014, 7:00 AM EST

Downtown Summerlin Opening

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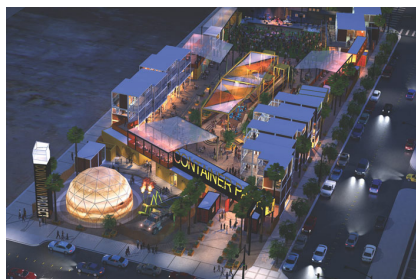
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LAS VEGAS What happens in Las Vegas isn't necessarily happening on the Strip anymore.

Much has been made of the Downtown Project led by Zappos C.E.O. **Tony Hsieh** (<http://www.bizbash.com/event-innovators-2014-tony-hsieh/new-york/story/28627/>), revitalizing the downtown area in part through a focus on buzzy live event experiences. And now, the Summerlin region on the outskirts of the city is getting its own glitzy bashes—with that area's largest-scale event ever taking over town on October 9 to 12.

The event was the grand opening of Downtown Summerlin, a new 106-acre, 1.6-million-square-foot shopping center marketing itself as a lifestyle destination and not just a mall. To launch it with appropriate pomp, developer Howard Hughes Corporation tapped **Extraordinary Events**

<http://www.bizbash.com/extraordinary-events/los-angeles/listing/802977>) for a four-day street festival. It drew more than 250,000 people and blew out retailers' expectations.

For the all-ages festival, Extraordinary Events set up a main stage at the end of Festival Plaza Drive, which provided the hub for main-attraction acts, entertainment, and a V.I.P. backstage experience for 1,400 invitation-only guests.

The first-night opening ceremony had a theme centered on all forms of light, with an LED drum line parading down the street to kick off the official ceremony. An eight-foot-high stage with branded graphics on enormous LED screens provided huge visibility for the 25,000 guests gathered on the street. Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval was on hand to welcome the crowd and introduce Howard Hughes C.E.O. David Weinreb, who cut a laser ribbon that cued multicolored lasers to shoot down the street as Light Force drummers on elevated platforms spelled out "Summerlin." Adding another layer of light, 10,000 LED Xylobands, which had been distributed to guests at the beginning of the evening, turned on simultaneously and pulsed to the music. **Fireworks by Grucci** (<http://www.bizbash.com/fireworks-by-grucci/new-york/listing/754180>)'s pyro spectacle followed.

The next day, an estimated 80,000 turned up, creating a festival atmosphere. Kids' activities included a piano juggler, a cartoon balloon artist, a photo booth, and face painters. For adults, there was an upside-down photo booth, social media photographers, and street performers. The second night's theme was sound, with the goal to create a club-like outdoor family-friendly environment. High-energy acts included DJ Z-Trip, Rhythm Extreme, and an electric violinist. Dancers took over the eight-foot-high platforms.

Day three drew a crowd of 80,000 and focused on street style. The stage was moved to make way for a 50-foot-long runway in the middle of the street featuring fashion shows hourly throughout the day from the stores of Downtown Summerlin. That night, dancers, skaters, LED drummers, ribbon twirlers, and stilt jumpers participated in another fashion show, which ended with a confetti blizzard and light show as *American Idol* beat boxer Blake Lewis and the West Coast Bouncers took the stage.

The final day of the weekend played to a large laid-back crowd and included performances from a robust lineup of jazz musicians. All the while, a giant social media wall with Downtown Summerlin branding provided a live feed for tweets, Instagram photos, Facebook statuses, and text message postings—making sure to proliferate the development's opening messages.

“Retailers were ecstatic,” said Downtown Summerlin director of marketing Vicki Rousseau. “The weekend results blew away the goals set. The series of events that we planned drove traffic to businesses and provided an unexpected experience while allowing the retail community to get involved and be a part of the festivities.”

Creative director Steve Cornwell added: “What we are hearing over and over is that the event was really the best, most talked-about event in Las Vegas in years. We felt that Vegas and the people of the community off the Strip deserved a celebration of the opening of downtown, not just the center. It wasn't just about launching the shops—that was important. But we also wanted the community to know that we were generating the downtown and that this was just the beginning. The future will bring more.”

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