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News Release

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Summer Solstice Jazz Festival Background

HISTORY: In 1996, under the direction of former East Lansing Arts Commission Co-Chair and jazz guru Al Cafagna, the East Lansing Arts Commission presented the City of East Lansing's first Summer Solstice Jazz Festival.

The first Summer Solstice Jazz Festival was scheduled to be held at "the rock" on Michigan State University's campus, however; because of bad weather the event was moved into the Erickson Kiva. Influenced by summer solstice celebrations in Europe, the festival went all night, beginning at 9 p.m. and lasting until dawn of the next morning.

The event continued to be held at the Erickson Kiva until its move to Ann Street Plaza years later. Ann Street Plaza, located in the heart of downtown East Lansing, became the festival's new location in an effort to attract more people into the business district. In 2004, the event was moved into a big tent in Parking Lot 1 to accommodate the growing crowds. Event attendance skyrocketed, growing from approximately 800 to 7,000 attendees over the years.

TODAY: The Summer Solstice Jazz Festival is a free two-day festival attended by more than 7,000 people. The event, staged under a big tent in downtown East Lansing, takes place in Lot 1 on the corner of Abbot Road and Albert Avenue each year.

In 2007 the City of East Lansing forged an exciting partnership with the Wharton Center for Performing Arts and the MSU College of Music. The three organizations now co-produce the festival.

The festival has begun to bring in national acts, with this years headliners being Esperanza Spalding and the Carl Allen/Rodney Whitaker Project. The ultimate goal of the festival is to continue to grow each year to one day become a major Michigan festival with statewide and national exposure.

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