

## **Solano Avenue Stroll User's Guide**

This guide is for Stroll vendors, including SAA members on Solano Avenue. It does not include the logistical information found on the website. This document is broken down as follows:

- A Brief Introduction
- Demographics and Character (Getting to know the locals)
- Items for your Consideration
- Any Business can Benefit from a Crowd of a Quarter-million People

### **A Brief Introduction:**

The Solano Avenue Stroll began in 1974 and is produced by the Solano Avenue Association, a group comprised of volunteers who are business owners on and near Solano Avenue. An accurate count is hard to get, but we are told that Stroll attendance generally reaches 150,000-200,000 people. This free community event is a closed-street festival that spans 26 blocks (1 mile long) and is located in two cities - Albany and Berkeley. It begins with an opening ceremony that starts at 10AM. Vendors and entertainers are strategically located throughout the avenue. A lot of effort goes into placing booths in appropriate locations. The event features areas focused on different sorts of vendors, such as crafters, theater and performance groups, political groups and so on. An exciting selection of food is one of the biggest draws and food booths (some put out by established restaurants, others from vendors or non-profits) are distributed all over the avenue. This is an alcohol-free event catering to families.

### **Demographics and Character:**

The Solano Avenue Stroll is unique partly because the festival spans two separate cities: Albany and Berkeley with differing demographics: Albany is primarily younger families with multiple children. Berkeley has in the past had a significant number of older/retired residents, but that demographic is also changing. Both communities are intelligent, community minded and politically savvy. Our data shows that approximately 80% of attendees come from Albany, Berkeley, and neighboring El Cerrito.

The crowd is culturally diverse, but more importantly people come to the Stroll for many different reasons -- it is important to understand your potential "customers".

Some people will be there to see a friend perform in a band or dance troupe, or perhaps they are looking for an opportunity to volunteer for a community organization. (We have almost 200 non-profit organizations who attend the event). Some come to the Solano Avenue Stroll to adopt a pet, talk to a political candidate, get a great deal on a new car, or maybe they're a teenager there to meet-up with friends.

**What is certain is that not everyone is going to stop at your booth.** In fact, a significant number of people “walking-by” are not going to stop for reasons ranging from being late for a performance to perhaps they are meeting a friend/family member down the block. Perhaps they are rushing to catch the shuttle bus, or just trying to find the closest restroom!

**This means that your success at the event, however measured – is a numbers game.** Out of this crowd of 100,000 diverse individuals – your targets and/or sales goals should be realistic and the following items carefully considered.

Tips for Success, what does success mean to you?

What is your goal, exactly? Then stick to it, avoid confusing the public with too many “items”. How are you going to convey your message AND get visitors to remember it?

**Remember the variable Bay Area weather:**

It rains at the Solano Avenue Stroll about twice a decade, which means most years the weather is awesome. We do recommend a canopy, and most vendors use them. The average temperature is in the mid 70’s, but without a canopy, that’s a lot of sun. The day typically begins cool with fog that usually breaks to sunshine later. In the afternoon it gets windy (sometimes significantly) and can become chilly. Food vendors may want to adjust their menus to serve warm beverages in the morning and later afternoon; non-profits you are going to want to put paper weights over any documents you are distributing. Please keep the varied weather in mind and consider how it may apply to you.

This is a mile-long event with vendors on both sides. You may not see the same person twice, so “close” when you can. Maybe that means selling those earrings or a hot dog - or signing up a volunteer for shore clean-up day – whatever it is, *do it now*. You can’t count on people being willing to come back to you to pick up a purchase, even if what you are selling is quite large. With larger or bulky items, an offer of free local delivery can make the difference. You may consider giving concessions when negotiating with someone who says they will “be right back” – they usually won’t be.

**The average festival guest is money conscious.**

People who attend the event are not necessarily expecting bargains, but they are wary of paying too much because it’s a special event. Keep this in mind when pricing your goods and consider offering something less expensive for the younger crowd – things like earrings for that teenager on a budget or a student discount at the food booths, or something else creative. We do not want the reputation of being too expensive to attend.

**A crowd attracts a crowd and an empty area is not attractive -- Keep traffic as high as possible at your booth.**

It's important to have something at your booth that attracts attention and entices people to stop. If you aren't selling eye-catching merchandise, get creative. Some ideas include having the [Sunday] football game playing on a TV everyone can see, or having a big bowl of colorful candy to attract the kids who will of course drag their parents over for that free piece of candy. Perhaps you should have something for the little ones to do while you talk business with the adults. Keep some coloring books and cold-water bottles on hand. Perhaps invest in a cold-water dispenser that everyone will see and encourage the public to stop and fill-up (the environmentally conscious do not use [plastic] water "bottles") Keep people comfortable and they'll stay longer.

There are considerable psychological reasons why you want to make sure your booth has traffic at all times, even if it is one of your own people standing in front of your booth!

The best booths offer something interactive and eye catching, with people staffing the booth who are attentive and engaged. On the other end of the spectrum are the booths that feature a plain table with some fliers and a person sitting in the back looking at their phone.

### **Any Business can Benefit from a Crowd of a Quarter-million People:**

You may not have a take-it-now item for sale and you may want to target clients for the future... A florist, for example. Flowers may not sell at the Solano Stroll. They are too fragile to carry around and the car is too far away (or too hot) to store them. But we recommend that the flower shops on Solano put out a beautiful display that will attract attention and hand out (with a smile) coupons good for perhaps twenty percent-off special event flowers (for graduations, etc.) or perhaps a coupon offering a discount for the next 30 days. Have people enter a drawing (again, generating traffic at your booth) for a free bouquet – delivered...

Hold a "flowers 101" class every hour if you have to, the Solano Avenue Stroll will give back what you put into it.

Do not ignore the power of coupons. Print a discount postcard nice enough for people to actually put on their fridge, with a discount significant enough to keep it there. Distribute coupons good on a birthday, or a two for one good during down time for your business. Invest in your coupon, it projects your image – most photocopied flyers just end up on the street or in the trash and you don't want your company associated with litter.

Be inventive. Ask a friend if your booth plans sound appealing or if your "give away" is worth stopping for. A considerable number of freebies end up in the trash at the end of the day; maybe you want people to "earn" or "win" the freebie so they are more likely to keep it.

Have a closer, something to tip the scale on that purchase to make it happen. Suggestions include covering the sales tax, or including an additional item. If it is a gift item, you can remind the potential buyer that there may be birthdays or anniversaries coming up?

You can promote yourself now and set yourself up for the future whether you are selling flowers or mortgages. Though in some cases you will not have customers on the day of the Solano Avenue Stroll but that does not mean you should ignore the potential from marketing your product or service for the future to a crowd of 250,000 avenue guests.

An event like this is a great way to expand your email list or social media connections. Offer something when folks sign up for your newsletter or connect to your account. If you don't want to buy a lot of inexpensive stuff to give away, have people connect to you in exchange for being entered into a drawing for a larger prize. If you don't want to deal with transcribing hand-written email addresses, display a QR code to make it easy for folks to connect directly online.

Unfortunately, at such a busy event, there is the risk of shoplifting and the use of counterfeit cash! If you are selling items that are easily carried or concealed, be sure that the more expensive items are not displayed right at the front of the booth. People staffing the booth need to be attentive. If you need to leave your booth for a few minutes, ask the SAA block captain (510-527-5358) or your booth neighbors to keep an eye on things.

### **Food Vendors including Solano Avenue Restaurants**

We prefer food vendors who sell food types that compliment existing Solano Avenue restaurants, no compete with them. Sometimes what is left is carnival food. At a festival the things that do best are the things you cannot (or should not) eat every day. Half of your customers are going to want to eat with one hand, and families and are looking for value meals. Try not overwhelm the public with a complex menu --confusion leads to long lines. Have just a few choices including something vegetarian, beef, chicken, and then pork – the standard fast foods. Consider a family deal; a discount on food for three or four people.

Solano Avenue restaurants should also have a simple outside menu of items appropriate for strolling. In fact, outside dining is preferred. The restaurants that do the best set-up tables outside on the street after the parade passes.

Contact the Solano Avenue Association for more suggestions; and feel free to share with us any input that would help your fellow vendors. Thank you and see you at the Solano Avenue Stroll!

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