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Guests take in some of what nature has to offer while listening to the sounds of one of the musicians entertaining at a previous Baker Backyard Blast. Comedian Sam Adams of Parker, Colo., will be on hand for this year's festivities along with some local talent as part of the event's theme "Art for your Ears." Courtesy photo

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times On a warm summer evening, there's nothing like sitting in the backyard while taking in all nature has to offer.

This Friday, locals can do that, along with some evening entertainment, in the backyard of Liberal's Baker Arts Center.

May and June are typically the months Baker has scheduled its annual membership drive, and normally in June, an event is scheduled in conjunction with that drive.

Four years ago, the center began what is known as the Baker Backyard Blast as that event. Baker's Toni Smith said the event is, basically, a backyard barbecue, and this year's event will feature hamburgers, hot dogs and potato salad, "the fixins of a barbecue."

"It is free to new and renewing members, and it is \$7 to the public," she said.

There will be much in the way of entertainment for both kids and adults at the event as well.

"We have a ton of kids activities that are going to be going on even through the eating time," Smith said. "There's face painting. There's balloons. There's ice sculpture, ring toss and the Oz train."

Comedian Sam Adams of Parker, Colo., will be on hand to share a few laughs with Friday's crowd. Smith said Adams was not always into the business of humor.

"He was a sports writer for the Denver papers," she said. "He's won a ton of awards. He won the National Comedy Award."

Adams will be joined by some local entertainment as well.

"We have some Spanish dancers coming," she said. "Jared Ratzlaff is going to sing. C.J. Wettstein is going to sing. We've got Cory Barnett's children. Obidiah is going to dance, and Tabitha is going to sing. We've got Alicia Henderson and Lydia Augustine doing some jazz music with their instrument. It's going to be a funfilled night full of kids' activities and lots of food."

Baker's Diane Marsh said some other agencies and groups will likewise be on hand to help with the fun.

"The fire department, the police department, the sheriff's and the Girl Scouts will be helping with different activities," she said. "I think they're going to bring their smoke house and Sparky the Fire Dog."

McGruff the Crime Dog will be at Baker as well. Smith said the Backyard Blast has a lot of activities and community involvement.

"We just want to invite the public," she said. "We want them to know that Baker is here and this is a fun night."

Smith said she feels \$7 for all the event has to offer is a reasonable price.

"They can be a member," she said. "We would love for the community to get more involved with Baker and know what we're about and the perks of being a member. There's changing exhibits all the time. It's not just about exhibits. It's about supporting your local art center. This is what is here for Southwest Kansas, and we would love to see it supported even more."

Marsh said the event is not a fundraiser, but rather a way of saying "thank you" to Baker's members.

"It's an invitation to the general public join us," she said.

The theme for this year's Backyard Blast is "Art for your Ears," and Smith said that concept has a simple explanation.

"You've got a comedian," she said. "You've got singers. You've got dancers. You've got musical instruments. It's outside entertainment for your ears to hear."

The Backyard Blast is scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m. Friday at the arts center at 624 N. Pershing. Tickets can be purchased at the door.

Who is Sam Adams?

Do not confuse him for being the guy on the beer bottle label, OK? This Sam Adams stepped in front of a microphone to perform stand-up comedy for the first time at age 41. Eight years later, the former award-winning sports journalist changed careers after winning at the 2009 Great American Comedy Festival.



On the record, Sam Adams is a club and corporate event headliner who has performed on stages in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Boston and New York, as well as fabled Colorado venues Red Rocks Amphitheater and Paramount Theater. He's also shared stage time with an eclectic, genre-jumping list of national touring comedians and music recording artists. Denver Business Journal once gave him a favorable review for "bringing down the house with a string of well-delivered lines that were notable for their lack of profanity, scatological or sexual references." (Sam was pleased by the review – especially after learning the definition of scatological!) Off the record, Sam Adams left his job as an office clerk in 1990 to pursue work as a sports writer. During a career that lasted 23 years, he established himself as one of Denver's premier sports journalists – voted by his peers as Colorado's "Print Journalist of the Year" in 2003. His work has appeared in print and video for The Denver Post, The Charlotte Observer, Rocky Mountain News and AvidGolfer magazine. His resume also includes television appearances on ESPN, Fox Sports, CBS and NFL Network. He has authored a book featuring highlights from his career in sports journalism titled, 'If You Don't Believe Me: Lessons Learned From Listening To The Greats.' Smooth. Clever. Clean. Colorful. Hilarious. These words are often used to describe Sam Adams on stage. He gives a performance you do not want to miss.

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