TOURISM

‘Free Fall Baltimore’ boosts city’s arts by nixing admissions

BY DORI BERMAN

Daily Record Business Writer

If you’ve always wanted to try your hand at pottery or check out some unique living history but never wanted to shell out the dough, here comes your chance.

More than 70 arts and cultural organizations in Baltimore will offer free programs in October and November as part of Free Fall Baltimore, a city-sponsored event aimed at bringing arts to the people and people to the arts.

Officials also hope the program will generate some tourism dollars.

“We wanted residents and visitors to have access, and we all know that admission fees are a barrier to access for a lot of people,” said Bill Gilmore, executive director of the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, which is organizing the event. “The second goal was to build audience. Every cultural organization needs to have an audience development plan, and we thought that this would be a big boost to any existing plan.”

The Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts held a competitive grant process to dole out $750,000 to organizations wishing to participate, provided they open the funded programs to the public. The dollars allocated were surplus general funds, Gilmore said.

Free Fall Baltimore builds upon announcements earlier this year by the Walters Art Museum and the Baltimore Museum of Art of plans to abolish their admission fees.

“We realized we should make this a concept available to everybody during arts and humanities month [in October],” Gilmore said.

More than 70 organizations will open their doors this fall as part of the program, offering a wide range of performances, exhibits and hands-on activities.

Karen Footner, development consultant for the mansion’s endowment fund, said she hopes the program will raise awareness about the different cultural and historical programs offered at the mansion.

Wilhelm plans to use the $4,000 he received for Lit’s Not Dead, an event planned for November that will feature live music and literature readings performed simultaneously.

Meanwhile, at the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion, which houses the Engineering Society of Baltimore, in Mount Vernon, audiences will experience an array of events including concerts, presentations and a Latin American dance program.

Karen Footner, development consultant for the mansion’s endowment fund, said she hopes the program will raise awareness about the different cultural and historical programs offered at the mansion.

If you’re not a history or literature buff and if you want to get your hands a little dirty, Baltimore Clayworks is offering free workshops in multiple locations throughout October and November.

“This grant is really a huge benefit for Clayworks,” said Community Arts Director Lauren Levine of the $10,000 given to the arts the arts, they also want the program to benefit the city’s tourism and service businesses. The Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association plans to market the event within 250 miles of the city. A Web site, www.freefallbaltimore.com, will have a complete listing of events and programs offered.

“It will make Baltimore stand out not only to cultural travelers, but it will also grab the attention of price-conscious consumers, who may want to come to Baltimore but save a little money,” said BACVA