

Whittall Mills star at Preservation Worcester benefit party Saturday



Deb Richards, Heidi Heifetz, Sue Ann Goodwin, Pat Glennon and Deborah Packard, from Preservation Worcester, decorate for the upcoming Carpetball Block Party at the Whittall Mills Complex. [T&G Staff/Ashley Green]

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Posted Jun 7, 2018 at 12:01 AM Updated Jun 7, 2018 at 1:31 PM

Even people who grew up in Worcester can experience the surprise discovery of a hidden gem, and this Saturday's Carpetball Block Party might bring the most seasoned resident to a new corner of the city.

The event will be held at the Whittall Mills, a historical mill complex located on Brussels Street behind Rotman's Furniture on Southbridge Street that was once the heart of the carpet industry. The mills have been on the National Register of Historic Places since the 1950s and were a bustling epicenter of carpet manufacturing at the height of the Industrial Revolution, but are still relatively unknown to many in the city.

“A lot of people, including myself, knew nothing about this place,” said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, which is holding the ball as part of its mission to bring attention to some of Worcester’s notable places with deep roots in the city’s rich cultural heritage.

With a Middle Eastern theme that puts a focus on the intricate carpets that once exemplified the mills, the Carpetball Block Party welcomes anyone looking to sample delicious food from local restaurants such as El Basha while they explore the expansive enclave of buildings. A cash bar will be available.

The setting for the party will extend across both the indoors and outdoors, inviting guests to see for themselves what is happening across the complex.

An outdoor bazaar, which will feature a harem of beautiful genies available for photo opportunities, will be the setting for some rousing rounds of carpetball, a Victorian game akin to shuffleboard where balls are rolled down long carpeted tables. The tables were constructed by students at Worcester Technical High School.

Entertainment for the ball, which despite its name is actually a casual affair where comfortable attire and sensible shows are encouraged because of the rough terrain of the buildings, will be provided by the Beantown Swing Orchestra. The band members are a young group of musicians who are looking to bring swing music back into vogue for a younger generation of people.

Home to a beauty salon, a roastery and cafe run by Acoustic Java, and dozens of startups and seasoned businesses alike, the mill buildings have been undergoing renovations and the entire property has been experiencing something of a renaissance, Ms. Packard said.

“It feels really good to be able to help promote this vibrant business community,” added Ms. Packard. “There are so many exciting things happening there.”

Along with the annual House Tours event, the ball is designed to bring much needed funds to Preservation Worcester, a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of buildings and sites that represent the culture, history and architecture of Worcester.

Tickets cost \$65 for Preservation Worcester members and \$75 for nonmembers, and will also be available for \$90 at the door. More information can be found at preservationworchester.org.