

First Night to star Chenille Sisters

By Helen Niemiec
staff writer

Grand plans for the area's second annual First Night celebration and a need for equally grand bucks are keeping organizers busy as they plan the New Year's Eve event set once again for downtown Birmingham.

The proposed program already includes a greater number of entertainment sites, a wider variety of entertainment and a grand finale — a laser light show with music and graphics.

Top acts include the Chenille Sisters, a musical comedy threesome making national appearances from their home base in Ann Arbor, and the Prisms Quartet, a saxophone quartet named "Outstanding Young Artists of 1989" by Musical America.

Kathy Walgren, one of the event's three chairpersons, called the plans "pretty exciting." The full program is expected to be in place by early October, with First Night admission buttons on sale in November.

Funds are not coming in as well as hoped, Walgren said. "With the state of arts funding and the Michigan economy, we should have expected this."

FORD MOTOR Company committed to the First Night event shortly after the conclusion of last year's event.

Walgren said that some firms have voiced concerns that they are contributing money to a fund-raiser — which Walgren said is not true.

"It's not a fund-raiser," she said. "We're trying to break even. This is an event that brings art into the



First Night/Birmingham audiences will find out that the Chenille Sisters — Cheryl Dawdy, Grace Morand and Connie Huber (left to right) — aren't sisters at all.

community and features Michigan artists. No one is making money on this."

But the volunteers in charge of fund-raising efforts aren't throwing in the towel. Instead, they are meeting with major corporations and pitching the alcohol-free, entertainment for all program.

One option patrons are receiving is for a specific company or firm to sponsor a specific event. A patron would be especially helpful for the grand — and rather expensive — laser show that caps the evening, Walgren said.

Some plans that the First Night organizers would like to implement are a shuttle bus between sites and street rovers, who don costumes to get visitors "in the mood for First Night," Walgren said. The hold-up on the shuttle bus is financial.

SITE PLANNERS have contacted a number of different locations, including some churches, and contracts are expected to be signed within a few weeks, Walgren said.

Zena Kramer, of First Night, said that the overwhelming response to the last year's event which drew more than 8,000 people from across the metro area made the committee decide early on to expand for the 1991 event.

The committee also heard a number of comments that last year's

countdown to the New Year didn't quite measure up to the quality of the rest of the evening. Hence, the laser light show, Kramer said.

"It's a combination of graphics and music. It's very exciting and very high energy. It's visually dynamic and the music is terrific," Kramer said.

Image Engineering would provide the laser show and has done similar shows for First Nights held throughout the country, including the Boston event which was the first held.

While New Year's Eve still is more than five months away, Kramer said volunteers and committee chairpeople have been meeting almost weekly. She said there is barely a day that goes by that one First Night committee meeting or another isn't scheduled.

"THAT'S REALLY a tribute to all our volunteers and the amount of time they contribute to this," Kramer said.

Walgren with the two other co-chairs — Nancy Cressy and Mark Jones — will be visiting Birmingham service clubs to recruit them into the First Night planning. One goal is to have each service club take charge of one of the First Night areas, such as signage or parking.

"It's really a community project," Walgren said.

Plymouth hearing set on Michigan Model

The Senate select committee examining the controversial school health curriculum called the Michigan Model will hold a public hearing 7-10 p.m. Monday, July 22 in the Plymouth Salem High School auditorium.

The five member Senate Select Committee to Study the Michigan Model is investigating parent complaints that the six year old curriculum is teaching elementary and middle school students about the occult and Eastern religions.

The lawmakers are looking at complaints that the program espouses a value free approach to premarital sex and substance abuse. "We will be especially listening to

parents and teachers," said Sen. Gil DiNello, D-East Detroit, committee chairman. "We need answers to these concerns. We want to hear from everybody involved. It's important that schools effectively complement what parents are doing if the home. We need to do everything we can to help keep families strong. Many parents have complained that the Michigan Model has a consistent anti-family message, said Sen. H. Robert Geake, R-Northville.

Four other hearings about the Michigan Model will be held around the state. They include July 31 in South St. Marie, Aug. 15 in Traverse City, Sept. 9 in Grand Rapids and Sept. 11 in Lansing.

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