*News Release*

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# FIRST NIGHT CONFERENCE BRINGS THE UNEXPECTED

*Downtown Akron Partnership's Communications Director gains insight at annual conference.*

Downtown Akron Partnership's Communications Director Sarah Steidl joined First Night producers from more than 30 First Night cities in Charlottesville, VA last week for the 20th annual First Night International Conference. Participants attended lectures, hands-on workshops, roundtable discussions, and sharing sessions to learn best practices from fellow First Night organizers.

"It was inspiring to meet so many First Night organizers," Steidl said. "The collective creativity and enthusiasm was infectious."

Steidl says many of the ideas and practices from the conference will be adapted and used at the 11th annual First Night Akron on Dec. 31, 2006 in downtown Akron.

"You can count on being surprised and delighted this year," Steidl said. "The only thing I'll give away this early is to expect the unexpected at First Night Akron 2007."

First Night International's mission is to promote and foster the concept of First Night; to authorize cities to hold this event and to assure compliance with prescribed standards; to provide a forum for ideas, information, education, and services for participating communities; thereby broadening and deepening the public's appreciation of the visual and performing arts.

First Night Akron is a program of Downtown Akron Partnership. Founding partners of the event are the City of Akron and the Akron Beacon Journal. Over the past 10 years First Night

has drawn more than 200,000 attendees and approximately 800 employed artists to the family-friendly alternative to New Year's Eve.  For more information about the event, visit www.firstnightakron.org.

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