

Information booth planned for pedestrian plaza, landscaping for Flatiron streets

By Sabina Mollot

With the weather already reaching summer levels this past week, the Madison Square Pedestrian Plaza, opened last summer, has become the place to be, for both local residents seeking a spot to soak in some sun, and tourists, worn out from picture taking.

The plaza, located east of Madison Square Park and another block south along Broadway, opened last summer and was one of a series of foot-traffic-only zones to be built throughout the city over the past year. Although it consists of nothing more than some tables, chairs and heavy planters, its popularity can't be disputed on warmer days when getting a seat can prove difficult.

According to Jennifer Brown, president of the Flatiron/23rd Street BID, which is responsible for maintaining the plaza, along with the Madison Square Park Conservancy, the space is expected to become even more of a draw next month once some improvements, including the planting of flowers and the opening of an information booth, are made.

Already, the hours that plaza is open each day have been extended to 8 p.m., and throughout the summer, it will remain open until 9 p.m.

"There are a bunch of things going on," said Brown, adding that the area from Third Avenue to Sixth would also see the addition of potted balcon geraniums hanging from every lamppost and new tree pit guards lining street trees and flowers surrounding each one. Part of it will be included in the mayor's One Million Trees program.

Flowers will also line Park Avenue South from 21st to 28th Street, including tulips and daffodils.

"We're hoping it'll make a big splash," said Brown on the flowers and booth for the plaza, which was built in an attempt to bring more foot traffic to local businesses.

Meanwhile, local merchants T&V spoke with this week spoke highly of the plaza, but said they were unsure whether or not the green initiative did anything to bring more bodies into their establishments.

Josh Konecky, owner of Fifth Avenue sandwich shop Eisenberg's, joked that he considered the plaza to be extension of his own business, as needed.

"Last summer, I asked customers if they wanted outdoor seating in the Eisenberg's garden—it's just on the other side of the Flatiron building," said Konecky.

"But has it helped? I really don't know. But I think it's nice, especially when it gets busy in here."

