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Business



PHOTOS BY DINA R. DRUCK/GLOBE STAFF

LOVING THE LAWN ON D

Convention center park hits the right note with outdoor bar, sense of fun

By Callum Borchers

GLOBE STAFF

Colin Kennedy was hosting a couple of friends from Philadelphia over Columbus Day weekend and wanted a fun place to grab drinks. Instead of hitting a bar near the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is a graduate student in physics, Kennedy brought his friends to, of all places, the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center.

They didn't go into the hulking convention hall, but rather the new park alongside it that's become one of the city's most popular new hangout spots — the Lawn on D, which features an outdoor bar, lawn games, and live music.

Last Friday evening found Kennedy's crew, all 25 years old, playing corn hole on the 2.7-acre expanse while sipping Samuel Adams Octoberfest in the balmy fall air.

"We wanted somewhere we could hang out outside — something different, rather than just grabbing a beer at a bar," said Michelle DeCaro, one of the out-of-towners.

Reactions like DeCaro's are exactly what convention center officials were hoping for when they unveiled the \$1.1 million Lawn on D in August. Located about halfway down the convention building on D Street, the park is on a temporary location the convention center plans to use for its upcoming major expansion.

But just a few weeks into its 18-month trial, officials have decided to find a permanent home for the park.

"We've seen enough already to know we need an outdoor space like this as part of our



permanent plans," said James Rooney, executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority. "It's been successful beyond our wildest dreams. Lately I've become worried about screwing it up."

The early success, Rooney said, can be attributed to the right balance of planned and spontaneous gatherings. With a 5,000-square-foot tent that houses the bar, the Lawn on D has hosted nearly three dozen events — concerts, art shows, screenings of Patriots games — that have drawn a total of about 30,000 people.

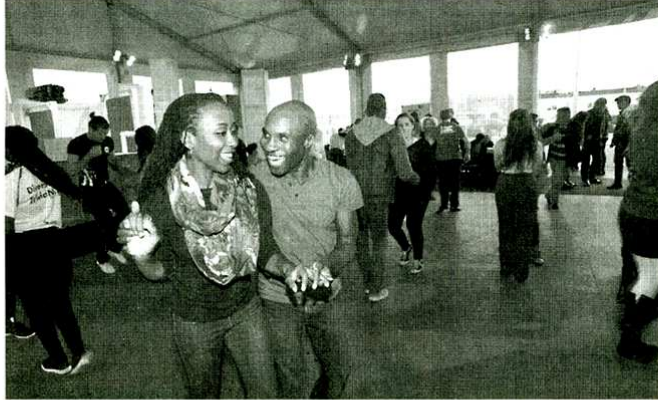
Yet most activities are unstructured, with workers from the Innovation District and nearby residents enjoying picnic lunches from cruising food trucks, or playing table

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Cassandra Richards and Mario Rodriguez rested on the park's glowing tire swings; "Salsa in the Park" drew dancers Yvette Philip and Darryl Robinson.



DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

The \$1.1 million Lawn on D has hosted about three dozen events since it was unveiled in August. Yvette Philip and Darryl Robinson danced at "Salsa in the Park."

Convention center's park is a hit

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tennis after hours.

The Lawn on D is embracing what downtown's other new park, the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, spent years resisting — its role as a simple open space with just a few fun amenities. As grandiose visions of a Garden Under Glass and a history museum never materialized, the 1.5-mile Greenway between North Station and Chinatown became a favorite

place for Bostonians and tourists to relax on a patch of grass amid concrete and steel.

Rooney said much of the foot traffic at the Lawn on D is prompted by social media. Caitlin Monahan and Pooja Shetty, seniors at Northeastern University, said they heard about the park on Facebook and decided to check it out last Friday afternoon.

The architecture students were intrigued by the Lawn's most prominent public art dis-

play, which resembles a series of glow-in-the-dark tire swings. They didn't even know about the bar or the live music.

"We came for this," said Shetty, swinging back and forth. "But if there's anything going on later, we'll stick around."

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