

CANCELLATION:
Event will carry on
and return in 2018

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board monitored the situation for days, consulting with meteorologists, fire managers and health professionals. Wednesday was the absolute last day the festival could make the call and still get all the work done necessary to produce the festival.

“We had to put our volunteers out on Wednesday afternoon if we were going to put it on — and we couldn’t do it,” he said.

Air quality on Wednesday was hazardous. Advice from health professionals was that the festival would be putting volunteers and paid work-staff into a potentially unhealthy condition if they were to exert themselves in the dense smoke. Schools sent students home due to poor air quality in the schools, which also impacted the festival. Plans had been drawn up to move some venues indoors to the schools, but the board couldn’t be assured of good air quality even there.

“We had a plan A, B, and C, and none of it worked,” Bott said.

The annual Americana Song Academy, held at Caldera at Blue Lake the week running up to the festival, was cut short by smoky conditions.

Air quality was extremely bad on Thursday, too, forcing cancellation of the pre-festival gathering of sponsors and Folk Art Circle members. And then it rained. It is a bittersweet irony for event organizers that air quality, which was still unhealthy Friday morning, improved steadily

through the weekend to the best it has been in weeks. The improvement — welcomed by all — came just a couple of days too late to salvage the festival.

While the cancellation was heartbreaking for staff, volunteers, artists and patrons, people did what they could to make the best of the situation. Singer-songwriter Martha Scanlan, who had taught at the song academy, organized artists who were in town for the song camp or who had arrived early for the festival, and pop-up concerts were held Friday and Saturday night at The Belfry. Owner Angeline Rhett opened the concert hall to the public for free, and patrons donated at the door to provide some pay for the artists.

On Sunday, local musicians joined community members at the Village Green for a spontaneous community gathering.

All of those spontaneous efforts to salvage some of the spirit of the annual festival seemed to lift peoples’ spirits — as did the sight of blue skies and the Sisters mountain skyline, obscured for weeks in a smog of wildfire smoke.

SFF Managing Director Ann Richardson said that a large number of both patrons and volunteers expressed appreciation for the decision to cancel in the interest of people’s health. She said the response from the public has been overwhelmingly supportive. She noted that many people have contacted the festival to explicitly state that they are donating the price of their 2017 ticket to the festival.

Richardson noted that any unused ticket value is a tax-deductible donation to a nonprofit 501(c)(3). She said the festival will develop a

mechanism to generate a tax receipt for anyone donating the value of the ticket.

Staff and board are still assessing the financial obligations of the festival for 2017 and expect to let ticketholders know what the festival plans to do in regard to any potential compensation in a couple of weeks.

“Until we fully assess our financial situation, we can’t know what we can do for our ticket-holders,” Richardson said.

The financial impact of the cancellation does not affect the event alone.

“Proceeds from the festival support our music and education programs in the schools,” Bott said. “It’s our number-one fundraiser... In a few weeks, we’ll know what we’re able to do and how it is going to affect our programs.”

The festival does not carry event cancellation insurance. Bott explained that premiums for such insurance are extremely expensive — and coverage is limited. In fact, cancellation insurance would not have covered the festival this year, because the board decided to cancel the event.

“You can’t make your own call on your event (and be



PHOTO BY CODY RHEULT

Singer-songwriter Martha Scanlan was instrumental in organizing a pop-up concert featuring several festival musicians at The Belfry on Friday.

covered),” he explained. “It has to be an external agency to shut down the event, and that wasn’t going to happen here.”

Despite the tribulations of

the past week, festival organizers take heart from the show of support among artists, patrons and community alike, and they vow to return in 2018.



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