

Sisters Folk Festival contributes to community

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

What began 23 years ago as a one-day music event with a few hundred attendees at the then Sisters Middle-High School (now the middle school), has grown and evolved into a three-day, 11-venue celebration of Americana music in which "All The Town's a Stage."

People come from within and well beyond Oregon to enjoy a rich variety of music by over 46 artists and groups during the Sisters Folk Festival. As the festival has grown, so has the town of Sisters. In 1996 the town's population was less than 1,000. Today it stands near 2,800 just within the city limits. Sisters Country (the school district boundaries) is closer to 10,000.

Attendance now reaches about 4,000 people who flock to Sisters the weekend after Labor Day for the three-day festival, one of the major events for which Sisters is famous. Others are the Sisters Rodeo, which will celebrate its 80th year in June 2020, and the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show, which attracts 10,000 people a year to town the second Saturday of July. The Sisters Rhythm and Brews Festival hosted its second

music event last month.

A newcomer in October this year will be the Sisters Book Festival, October 18-20.

These city-wide events contribute to the economic vitality of this small town at the foot of the Cascades and make the name of Sisters, Oregon, known internationally.

Accommodation for event attendees, including lodging and camping facilities, restaurant meals and food, parking and fuel, medical and other services, and shopping, help support local businesses. The festival had to be cancelled in 2017 due to the health hazards of smoke from surrounding wildfires. That cancellation hit the local economy hard.

Throughout the years, the SFF has worked closely with the City and local businesses to maximize local benefits of the festival and minimize any

disturbance or inconvenience to the citizens of Sisters.

Larger crowds mean more demand for parking spaces around the various venues. Each year, the SFF has worked to improve their operations. They have arranged for bike corrals, shuttles, and venues within walking distances to encourage a reduction in auto traffic. This year, there is a new camping venue available at the high school parking lot (see related story, page 1).

What started as the dream of local residents Jim Cornelius, editor in chief of *The Nugget*, and initial owner of Paulina Springs Books, Dick Sandvik, has grown into a year-round center for creativity and community music.

In addition to producing the annual Folk Festival, this local non-profit has sponsored the Americana Project in the Sisters schools for the past 20

years, providing arts-related education for all grade levels. The program has expanded to include visual arts as well. The luthier program at the high school teaches students how to make their own ukuleles and guitars. This year, six alumni of the Americana Project will be performing during the Folk Festival.

The Americana Project Arts Outreach Scholarship program, in partnership with Family Access Network, provides arts-related scholarships to over 100 Sisters children, enabling them to take dance classes, art classes, and music lessons, helping students realize their full potential.

Songwriting camps for both adults and youth are held each year, with SFF performers providing the instruction for the adult camp held for three days at Caldera prior to the festival.

In recent years, as a way

of saying thank you to the community for its support of the SFF, a series of three free summer concerts has been held at Fir Street Park. During the quieter winter season, the Winter Concert Series brings first-rate performers to the high school auditorium for the enjoyment of ticketholders. Those performers also spend time in the classrooms with students.

The newest SFF project is the Connected by Creativity capital campaign, which is enabling the purchase of the Sisters Art Works building, a strategic investment in a permanent facility for SFF and providing for expanded programming of multigenerational classes and events, greater community collaboration and partnerships, and stimulating the regional economy by growing a vibrant music and arts culture attracting visitors to Sisters.



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