



**SALINA
ARTS**
& HUMANITIES

Hometown Artist Creates 45th-Anniversary River Festival T-Shirt

(Salina-KS 06-21) When firm dates for the 45th-anniversary Smoky Hill River Festival were announced in February, many River Festival fans were elated, but none so much as Salina mixed-media artist Julie Cates, who was selected to design the Festival T-shirt for the second year in a row.

“I was overjoyed,” Cates said about the Festival’s return for 2021. “It felt like the first glimmer of hope that life and celebration could return to Salina. I wanted the 45th-anniversary T-shirt design to reflect that excitement.”

Born in Kansas City and raised in Salina, Cates’s love for creating began in Anne Nettleton’s first-grade art class at Hageman Elementary School. “I sold my first drawing entitled “Sam, My Cat” for 50 cents at the counter of my parent’s chicken restaurant at the age of six.” After attending K-State Manhattan, then the University in Illinois, Cates moved to Warm Springs, GA to serve as the director for the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation, running sports programs for elite wheelchair athletes.

“When 9/11 happened, I didn’t love not being able to come home, and I missed Kansas,” Cates says. “Robin was working in retail and wanted more freedom, so we asked ourselves what we could do that was more creative and closer to home. In December 2001, we came up with a five-year plan, and five months later, we had a building and were open.” As Cates came back to her life’s calling, she says, “I realized I should have listened to my mother in the first place, and I returned to art.”

In 2002, Julie and sister Robin opened On The Pot: A Pottery Playhouse, in downtown Salina. Over the years, they have assumed various roles to lead and encourage other business owners or designers in the pottery industry. In 2015, Cates launched the Good JuJu Art Paper Goods Line, sold in retail locations nationally for three years. In 2016, PYOP Studio Stuff began carrying their silk-screen designs, now sold globally.

In creating the 2021 T-shirt, Cates wanted to highlight the River Festival’s vibrancy, togetherness, and fun. “The bright, colorful elements springing out of the ‘2021’ are meant to represent Salina and the Smoky Hill River Festival bursting with excitement, as our community looks forward to coming together again.” Inclusion of a spray-paint can, a balloon, musical instruments and other icons represent some of her favorite aspects of the Festival.

Cates’ professional relationship with the River Festival goes back to 2009, when she first worked as an Installation Artist. From 2014-2016, she exhibited and sold in the Four Rivers



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT:
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Craft Market, now known as the West Side of the Fine Art and Craft Show. Since 2017 and again for 2021, Cates will work as a Demonstration Artist, showing and selling her wood mixed-media pieces.

“I can’t think of very many things that unite our city like the Festival,” Cates says. “I love looking around and seeing the hundreds of volunteers who happily come out and give of themselves, to make sure the park is clean, the artists are taken care of, and that everyone is having a safe, fun time. That’s what keeps the artists, makers, performers and others coming back.”

Time spent at the Festival guided Cates towards a career in art. “One of my earliest memories is making buttons in the children’s tent,” she says. “It was the first time my artwork had been turned into something finished- it felt permanent and kind of professional. A couple of years ago, one of the kiddos who purchased one of my First Treasures pieces came to visit my booth and gifted me with a button she had made. I must admit, I cried a bit.”

Along with being a Festival artist, Cates is one of its biggest fans. “The Festival brings the arts to the center of our city. It’s the time when our community becomes its very best. The park comes alive with color, music, laughter and reunions, filled with people from every corner of the country with different viewpoints on every subject. For four days, we come together to be treated to a feast of the senses. It’s a celebration of who we can be.”

Regionally, Cates’ multimedia work has been shown at the Salina Country Club, the Salina Community Theatre, the Five Star Art Festival in Abilene, and is sold at A Store Called Stuff in the Brookside area of Kansas City, Mo.

For needed accommodations, please call Amanda Morris at Salina Arts & Humanities at 785-309-5770 between 8:00 a.m. - Noon and 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Every effort will be made to accommodate known disabilities. For material or speech access, please call at least five working days prior to the event.

The Smoky Hill River Festival, now in its 45th year, is the flagship event produced by Salina Arts & Humanities. A department of the City of Salina, SAH has served a unique role as an arts advocate and resource partner since 1966. The Smoky Hill River Festival, Horizons Grants Program, Smoky Hill Museum, Arts Infusion Program in schools, Community Art & Design, and Creative Connections are among the programs of Salina Arts & Humanities, located at 211 W. Iron Avenue in Salina.

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