



NEWS RELEASE

SMOKY HILL RIVER FESTIVAL 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

(Salina, KS 07-22) The Smoky Hill River Festival was a success. Salina Arts & Humanities staff report that it was a very smooth year that generated just over one million in admission, art, and food sales.

There were 15,814 wristbands sold, generating an income of \$212,124, the highest in seven years. Wristband sales represent the Festival's largest income stream, providing the necessary funds to produce the event. While sales were strong, the final weekend gate count was 61,752, nearing pre-pandemic attendance. "The park felt more active with larger crowds than in recent years," commented Salina Arts & Humanities Operations & Development Manager Anna Pauscher Morawitz.

"The staff works hard to ensure that income exceeds expenses for the event and that it stays within the annual budget," said Brad Anderson, Executive Director of Salina Arts & Humanities, "It's going to be another good year financially." The remaining Festival budget comes from other earned revenue, and one-third comes from cash contributions by individuals, businesses, and charitable foundations. Additionally, in-kind support from local businesses help lower festival expenses.

Visual Artists Fare Well

One hundred twenty-two visual art exhibitors displayed and sold work in the Fine Art and Craft Show and the Art Demonstration area. The growing Art Patron Program included the Thursday night PREMIERE party attended by 413 artists and purchase patrons. Overall sales for the 2023 art show and Art/Craft Demo area exceeded \$460,000. Art sales are the single greatest factor leading to artists returning to the event and promoting the show to their peers. Thousands of attendees engaged with site-specific art installations by 22 artists. "These imaginative installations create a unique festival environment, surprising and engaging our community with art in new ways," commented Crystal Hammerschmidt, Visual Arts Coordinator at Salina Arts & Humanities.

Energetic Performances

Diverse music on three live stages captivated Festival-goers this year. From headliners Paramount, Welshly Arms, Howard Mahan, and beyond, musical genres for 2023 included country, rock, soul, indie folk, and innovative fusion groups.

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This year featured the largest number of first-time acts in recent years including Gabe Lee and King Margo from Nashville, TN, Caitlin Krisko & The Broadcast from Asheville, NC, Making Movies from Kansas City, and 123 Andrés from Washington D.C. Clan Tynker enthralled audiences at the children's stage and throughout the park. Returning Drum Safari, Richard Renner, and the Flint Hills Fairies were three of the eight roving acts that entertained Festival fans of all ages.

Family Fun

Artyopolis welcomed over 2,000 children who participated in various make-and-take craft activities under the big tent of Creation Crossing. Family fun was had by all as adults and children lined up to receive face painting and airbrush tattoos in Paintchoo Plaza. With new facades designed by local artist Craig Hinca, Game Street was busy with family and friends competing to get a high score.

First Treasures, a program for young collectors, saw 500 children select their own artwork from 102 participating artists. Many young art buyers visit artists at their booths to learn more about the art they create and sell.

Food Galore

Festival fans enjoyed Food Row favorites plus trying new offerings from ten new food vendors in 2023, including pineapple and watermelon smoothies. Food sales by 36 vendors totaled \$359,814 in food for varied appetites. The 2023 food sales were the highest ever.

Chill Vibes Sunday

The event's final day was more energetic than in recent years, thanks to a new direction with programming and a high of 76 degrees Fahrenheit. New programming included a focus on local/regional entertainment on the stages and a special scavenger hunt of 100 metal dragonflies, hand-painted by Kansas City Artist Evan Brown, AKA Doodle Dood. The community enjoyed coming out to a less crowded park to eat, listen to music, buy art, and hunt for a dragonfly. The Sunday gate count of 7,259 makes it the second highest in a decade.

Making it Happen

Over 1,800 volunteers supported the event through committee work and individual shifts, managing the gates, taking care of artists, allowing children to create and use their imaginations, and supporting Festival operations and auxiliary events. Volunteers continue to be an essential resource in keeping the Festival affordable and providing high levels of customer service for thousands of participants.

“The 47th Smoky Hill River Festival was a great success,” says Anderson. “Community engagement makes the Festival one of the best in the Midwest.”

The Festival also benefits from the support of part-time seasonal Festival staff and City staff in every department. “Everyone’s dedication to the event is what makes it happen each year. It’s incredible to watch the community come together and support the Festival, making it even more special,” says Pauscher Morawitz.

2024 Plans Already Underway

Festival staff and committees are already preparing for next year's event. Extensive evaluations occur, and detailed plans are made

based on participant and patron feedback. The 48th Smoky Hill River Festival will be held in Oakdale Park on June 13-16, 2024.

For information on how to get involved in the Smoky Hill River Festival or other Salina Arts & Humanities programs, call 785-309-5770, visit riverfestival.com, or e-mail sah@salina.org.

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.

Salina Arts & Humanities, a department of the City of Salina, 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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