

SEASONAL Spotlight



WILD, WILD WEST

West Fest Welcomes Family-Friendly, Cowboy-Style Fun

BY DONNA HARRIS

AN ANNUAL BARTOW COUNTY event has created a way to bring a sample of Southwestern history to the Southeast. For the 22nd year, the Booth Western Art Museum will transform its festival grounds at the corner of Howard and Gilmer streets in Cartersville into a family-oriented celebration of all things western at West Fest, planned for Oct. 26 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOOTH WESTERN ART MUSEUM



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SETH HOPKINS,
BOOTH WESTERN ART MUSEUM



WESTERN CULTURE COMES TO LIFE

The 120,000-square-foot Booth — the largest museum of its kind in the Southeast and an affiliate to the Smithsonian Institution — houses the world’s largest permanent exhibition space for Western art.

“West Fest was started as a way to bring the artwork in the Booth’s collection to life for the public to enjoy and to learn about the history of the West,” said Executive Director Seth Hopkins, noting the first festival occurred “only a couple months after we opened our doors in 2003.”

“By seeing the encampments on our grounds and getting to interact with Western culture firsthand, the public can use the experience to better interpret and enjoy the great works of art on display in the museum’s galleries.”

The rain-or-shine event, which also includes two days of programming for area schools on Oct. 24 – 25, was formerly known as the Southeastern Cowboy Festival and Symposium, but officials changed the name last year to help further identify it with the museum’s collection.

“It was originally named the Cowboy Symposium, patterned after similar events out West in places like Ruidoso, New Mexico and Lubbock, Texas,” Hopkins said. “We later added the word ‘festival’ to imply it was more fun and family-friendly than people may have known. We then recently rebranded the event as West Fest to signify our commitment to making the event as inclusive as possible, representing all the people of the West and still retaining the festival atmosphere.”

Hopkins said West Fest is the “biggest event on our annual calendar,” and he expects as many as 5,000 people to visit the festival grounds over the three-day period.

“About half the attendees are from Bartow County; the rest come from 50 to 100 or more miles away,” he said. “We always have a sizable group from around the Southeast make a special trip here for the weekend.”

A FEAST OF FAMILY FUN

Among the activities and entertainment on tap for the festival are live performances, hayrides, a variety of food trucks, local vendors selling unique products and crafts, a petting zoo and more.

“This year, West Fest promises to be a lot of fun, with plenty of attractions for people of all ages ... It offers a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in the culture and history of the American West.”

The live performances seem to generate the most interest among festivalgoers, according to Hopkins.

“Everyone is always drawn to the Native American dancing presentation,” he said. “It is an interesting opportunity to learn about the side of Western culture people are not usually exposed to. The gunfight reenactments also get a big crowd for their action-packed excitement. People just love seeing the live performances in general. We have different ones every year.”

Festival admission is included with the regular museum admission: \$13 for adults, \$11 for seniors age 65 and older, \$10 for students and free for children 12 and younger and for museum members. Active military members are free with ID, and active-duty dependents with ID receive half-price admission. **NGL**

For information about the festival, visit boothmuseum.org/west-fest.