Bluesfest gears up for third consecutive year

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The Clemson Blues Festival, or "Bluesfest" as it's more commonly known, will take place for the third consecutive year starting April 13. However, this year will see surrounding areas involved for a festival that will also encompass additional days.

"We've extended it to a full week and have gotten into the county, inviting more sponsors and trying to bring in quality entertainment," said Vince Jackson, founder and organizer of the event. "I have a core group of 25 to 30 volunteers that work on this and they're a great group of people."

This year's Bluesfest will kick off with Gospel Sunday from 3-6 p.m. April 13 at Southern Wesleyan University. Each evening will feature a different event, with the African-American Heritage CATBus Tour from 9:45 a.m.- noon April 14 and 15; Monday Evening Blues in Walhalla at 7 p.m. April 14 at the Walhalla Civic Auditorium; Freddie Vanderford in Six Mile at 6 p.m. April 15; SWU Jazz Band in Pickens at 7:30 p.m. on April 16; Beer, Buffet and Blues at The Red Minnow at 7 p.m. April 17; More Blues at The Esso Club, 9:30 p.m. April 18; Main Event at Patrick Square noon to 6 p.m. April 19; and a reception honoring bluesman Drink Small 7 p.m. April 19.

The reception for Small, to be held in the Clemson Area African American Museum at 214 Butler Street, will honor the soul blues and electric blues guitarist, singer and songwriter. Small is known as the "Blues Doctor" and is one of the original Littlejohn's Grill performers.

Jackson said this year's festival will also feature The Swingin' Medallions, a beach music band that will be making its inaugural appearance.

"They haven't played in Clemson for over 20 years and they're looking forward to it as much as I am," Jackson said.

The Walhalla Civic Auditorium will also be a first time participant in the Bluesfest. Jackson said three bands — The Wobblers, Crank Dogs and The Scopes Family Band, named after the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, will provide more than two hours of entertainment. The cost is $5 and will feature blues bands and light classic rock.

More than 4,000 people from as far as Cleveland and Baltimore, as well as throughout the Southeast, attended last year's festival. Jackson is hopeful that with the Swingin' Medallions first visit, coupled with a return visit by Mac Arnold and the addition of reggae music, the number will be even higher this year.

Admission to the Patrick Square Main Event is a minimum $10 donation per person or $20 per family and parking is free. To purchase all event passes, as well as obtaining information on the calendar schedule, list of performers and videos of the performers in action, go to www.clemsonbluesfest.org.

Jackson pointed out that the Bluesfest is a 501(c) 3 organization and that monies raised from the event go back into local charities, such as Sertoma Club, Rotary Club or non-profit groups such as NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness).

"People are interested in live music," said Jackson. "That's what it's all about — giving back and being a part of things."

Not only is Jackson and his volunteers feverishly working to make this year's Bluesfest a success, they're already working on next year's event as well — raising money and lining up venues.

"It's a continuous thing," he said.

goliver@upstatemedia.com | (864) 973-6687
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True Blues, known as "Greenville's House Band," will join The Swingin' Medallions, Mac Arnold and Plate Full O' Blues and Reggaeinfinity from noon to 6 p.m. April 19 at Patrick Square. The performances will be part of the Main Event at Patrick Square.