

PHOTOS COURTESY BARRY G. RICHARDS

From left, singer/songwriter Sandy Atkinson, Swingin' Medallions drummer Robby Cox and blues veteran Drink Small perform during the 2014 Clemson Blues Festival, held last week at various sites in Clemson and surrounding areas.

PLAYIN' THE BLUES

Despite rain, third annual Bluesfest another success

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The third annual Clemson Blues Festival, or Bluesfest, featured a little bit of everything, both in music and history.

Musically, the event was expanded to eight days this year and featured new locations in Walhalla, Pickens and Six Mile with a wide range of music — from blues to gospel to reggae to beach.

The festival also marked the addition of a tour of historic African-American sites and a tribute to legendary blues performer Drink Small.

"I think we had a great event," organizer Vince Jackson said. "We had a rainy Saturday (the final day), but an enthusiastic crowd of 350 (at

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PHOTO COURTESY BARRY G. RICHARDS

Max Hightower, of Mac Arnold and Plate Full O' Blues, displays his harmonica expertise at the 2014 Clemson Blues Festival.

FEST: Raised $4K for charities

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Patrick Square). We're a rain-or-shine event, so we're going to be there and want people to have a good time."

Throughout the week, events featured a gospel program at Southern Wesleyan University, the SWU Jazz Band, as well as blues performers in Mac Arnold and Plate Full O'Blues and Drink Small. Small, who is 82, appeared at the Clemson African-American Museum auditorium Saturday evening and was presented a proclamation by Clemson mayor J.C. Cook in recognition of his musical contributions.

Jackson said he was uncertain as to whether Small, who is ill, would be able to perform. However, Small did and sang and played three songs with his guitar.

"He lives to perform," Jackson said. "It invigorated him. It was just a real emotional thing for him, and he was real pleased to be recognized that way. This may have been his last performance."

The tour of African-American historic sites, including the location where Littlejohn's Grill once sat, home to many future blues and rock and roll performers, proved to be extremely popular.

"It was very well attended," he said. "People were enthusiastic, and we plan to continue them and add more."

Jackson said there has been interest in doing a film series on the Bluesfest and a documentary on Littlejohn's Grill. Jackson hopes to add Pendleton to its list of locales and make it a tri-county event.

Jackson said attendance would have been even better had the event not coincided with the Easter holiday weekend. He said Bluesfest will take place the last week in April next year.

"Easter is earlier (in the month), so that will help," Jackson said.

Not only did Bluesfest provide plenty of musical entertainment, it raised $4,000 for local charities.

"That's one of our goals," Jackson said. "We're about helping businesses, helping musicians and raising money for charities."

Jackson especially thanked the 25 volunteers who assisted in a variety of ways.

"They're the ones that made it happen," Jackson said. "Everyone working together is a big piece of the puzzle."

goliver@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6687
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