

Mississippi Earthtones Festival Again Celebrates River Through Art, Music and Conservation

by Sara McGibany

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ALTON - The Mississippi Earthtones Festival, presented by Alton Main Street, the Sierra Club, and Jacoby Arts Center is a celebration of our river through art, music, and conservation. The 17th Annual event will be held on the riverfront at Alton Amphitheater on Saturday, September 16th from 12:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., and there is no charge for admission.

This year's theme is "Love Joy Flow", and local artists have been commissioned to build large installations that will enhance the festival grounds. The Riverbend Yarn Bombers are knitting & crocheting a colorful textile canopy to provide shade for festivalgoers. Kooliverse will present eye opening artworks of wonder and intrigue, including a 16-foot kaleidoscope and a backdrop for the stage which will feature an amazing light show by local projection artists upon nightfall. Many local artists are collaborating to create a grove of larger-than-life whimsical mushrooms for a wonderful photo opportunity. JF Perspective is creating earthen sculptures that depict native plants and animals. New this year, ARTICA has created dozens of paper mache river creatures made of homegrown and recycled elements. The group will team up with the Joia World Percussion group for two rousing parades through the festival grounds. Attendees are welcome to check in at the ARTICA booth to select a puppet to carry and participate in these boisterous performances, one during daylight hours and one after dark.

Jacoby Arts Center has lined up an amazing art playground of performances and interactive experiences, featuring music, live painting, and dance performances, plus

free art activities for all including make your own sun cyanotypes, yarn art and more. A big top tent will provide a shady “Zen Zone” coordinated by Soul Sanctuary, featuring yoga classes, guided meditation sessions, a Lion Dance and a Tai Chi class from Iron Dragon Kung Fu, chair massages, and a spiritual discussion with Sound of Soul.

Live music will fill the air throughout the day. The entertainment line-up on the main stage will feature: Mattie Schell & Friends (Americana) from 12:00-2:00, Loftys Comet (Alternative Indie Jazz) from 3:00-6:00, Jake’s Leg (Grateful Dead Tribute) from 7:00-10:00, and between each act will be a performance by Jason “Gordo” Gordon (1-Man, 10-Piece Band) from 2:00-3:00 and 6:00-7:00. ASL interpreting will be provided on the main stage from 3:00-10:00 p.m. by Gateway Interpreting Services, sponsored by Challenge Unlimited.

New this year, the Mississippi Water Trail Association is coordinating the Firecracker Race, a canoe, kayak, and stand-up paddleboard race from Grafton to Alton which will conclude at the festival. Check-in for participants begins at 7:00 a.m. and watercrafts are expected to start crossing the finish line at 12:30 p.m. or soon thereafter. The racers can be viewed on the river from the wrought iron fence on the river wall near the playground at Riverfront Park. 45 racers have registered so far and you still have time to sign up at www.FirecrackerRace.com.

A variety of fun and educational activities are planned for families from 12:00-6:00, and there will be several agencies and companies on hand to teach consumers how to incorporate more sustainable practices into their daily lives. A passport featuring 20+ activities for kids will be distributed to families at the entrance to the festival grounds. The Sierra Club will have an informational booth on pollinators and clean energy, as well as a children’s booth with a gyotaku fish printing activity. “This year’s event offers strong education components that are working towards a sustainable future, especially as it relates to the Mississippi River,” says Christine Favilla, Three Rivers Project Co-Coordinator for Alton’s Sierra Club, adding “Carbon offsets will be purchased to compensate for the emissions of the event which alleviates the effect on climate change and makes the festival carbon-neutral.”

The Alton Museum of History & Art will present information on the history of the Mississippi River, including an interactive 18th century mini-press, fossils, area history, and local art. The Hayner Public Library District will highlight items from circulating and special collections, and will also have items from their new Library of Things. There will also be information on Elijah P. Lovejoy, whose final printing press resides in the Genealogy & Local History Library’s foyer, photographs from the Robert K. Graul collection, and Alton-themed children’s books available for sale.

Visit the National Great Rivers Research & Education Center booth to learn about big river research along with an all-ages activity that highlights the importance of a healthy river. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources will offer a nature interpretive booth. Park rangers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rivers Project will explain how they manage forest and prairie habitats along the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Learn about commonly encountered wildlife, species of concern, and recreational opportunities within the region. Rangers will have games for younger visitors and will be passing out seed packets and bookmarks!

The Nature Preserve Foundation will be sharing information on their work at the Watershed Nature Center and other local green spaces that will provide children and parents the opportunity to interact and connect with their local greenspace; at their booth you can pick up an Adopt-a-Tree activity packet and embark on a scavenger hunt. At the Illinois Natural History Survey Great Rivers Field Station booth, families will learn how to identify common fish found in the Mississippi River.

Visit Heartlands Conservancy to learn about the Madison County Transit Trails Master Plan with visual preference surveys, educational exhibits, and give aways. The RideFinders booth will highlight the benefits of riding together instead of making solo commutes for air quality improvement - children will be encouraged to draw earth friendly art on the RideFinders va and adults will enjoy great giveaways!

New this year, the Legendary Mustang Sanctuary will bring two horses to the event that you can visit with while learning about the organization's efforts to rescue wild mustangs and burros through rehabilitation and adoptions to preserve a part of American history. At the Wild Bird Sanctuary booth you can visit with a bald eagle, and the Treehouse Wildlife Center will introduce you to a turtle named Murray. Visit The Nature Institute to check out native species of macroinvertebrates that can be found in our area. Project Coyote will offer an educational booth on wildlife coexistence, biodiversity and wildlife corridors, with family friendly info on the organization's public awareness efforts to ban wildlife killing contests.

At the Madison County Building & Zoning tent you can do an energy generation activity and learn about the County's Green Schools Program. At the Blue Wave Spirit Martial Arts booth you can learn about their programming offered at the YWCA and see the group perform demonstrations, plus kids will enjoy an awesome obstacle course.

With the Lewis & Clark State Historic Site you can learn about how Lewis & Clark navigated the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers with a replica keelboat and other hands-on replica tools and furs that served the expedition. At the Great Rivers Environmental

Law Center booth you can learn about Missouri's first and only public interest law firm focused on the environment and public health, with services provided free of charge to protect the places and people that need us most.

Festivalgoers can purchase native wildflowers and trees from Green Thumb Nursery, and make biodegradable flowerpots to plant at your home with Midwest Members Credit Union. Senior Services Plus will have a kids' activity table to promote the benefits of local agriculture and companion planting while spreading the word about the SSP School House Acres Farm.

The Better Building Institute will teach about energy efficiency, zero-energy home building, and energy audits. The Climate Reality Project will offer fun educational puzzles to teach children about plastic pollution, and recycling.

Dozens of local artisans will offer nature-inspired, hand-made, and environmentally-friendly wares. You'll find wearable art such as tie dyes, knit and crocheted items, leatherwork, handmade pet accessories and upcycled jewelry. A variety of handmade all-natural soap and handcrafted body care products will be available, and you'll also find unique home décor, cigar box guitars, pottery, bird feeders, nature themed artwork, photography, products made with local honey, woodworking items, thrifted clothing, hemp products, ethically sourced mineral specimens, and plants. Enjoy a glass blowing demonstration from Alley Cat Glass!

Make sure to gather in front of the main stage at 4:20 to be a part of our arial photo provided by 618 Drone Service! At 4:30, three local champions for the environment will be presented with the Confluence Conservation Leadership Award: Carla Cope, Clifford Clark, and Tim Podhorn.

Come hungry because there will be a great selection of local food & beverages on site from The Old Bakery Beer Company, Gentelin's on Broadway, Taqueria Los Toros, Big Boys Q, Food Revival Food Truck, Fia Wood Fired Pizza, Rollin Dogs, Team Honduras, The Brown Bag Bistro, Taqueria Maya, Mo'z Sweet Treats, CJ's Juicery, and Bubba Grump's Smoked Pretzels. Illinois American Water will bring their trailer of spigots offering free chilled water, our guests are encouraged to bring a reusable water bottle.

A few volunteer shifts remain on September 16th at the festival grounds, and anyone who pitches in will receive a free festival t-shirt. Volunteers can also participate in the MEF River Clean Up, which will take place the following Saturday, Sept. 23rd. Boats will ferry volunteers to clean up riverbanks and islands from 9am-12pm, and pre-

registration is required to reserve your seat. Approximately 46 tons of trash have been removed from the Mississippi River during MEF clean-ups to date. Volunteers can register online for both options at www.DowntownAlton.com/Events.

“We look forward to filling our riverfront with a celebration of the beautiful Mississippi River,” said Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street, adding “This event attracts the most wonderful attendees who are passionate about protecting Alton’s greatest natural asset.”

This festival is held annually on the third Saturday in September as part of the State of Illinois’ “It’s Our River Day” initiative to celebrate Illinois watersheds through education, recreation, and conservation. Alton’s free community river celebration would not be possible without the generosity of our community. Alton Main Street, the Sierra Club, and Jacoby Arts Center express their sincere appreciation to the following local businesses and organizations for supporting the event: City of Alton, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, Simmons Hanly Conroy, Busey Bank, Greater St. Louis, Inc. #STLMade initiative, Village of Godfrey, Kooliverse, The Old Bakery Beer Company, Midwest Members Credit Union, Chiro One Wellness Centers, Taqueria Los Toros, Imperial Manufacturing, Madison County Building & Zoning, Illinois Natural History Survey - Great Rivers Field Station, Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency, Heartlands Conservancy, LebanonGemCo., Green Thumb Nursery, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The Telegraph, Riverbender.com, AdVantage and WBGZ Radio.

For more information, please visit www.DowntownAlton.com. To stay up-to-date on announcements, please visit: www.facebook.com/EarthtonesFestival.

