



Events and festivals like Little Rock's Main Street Food Truck Festival, which the Arkansas Festivals & Events Association named the 2018 Festival of the Year, help bring communities together, attract visitors, and drive the economy.

Local festivals and events build community

By Shelby Fiegel

You would be hard pressed to find a weekend in Arkansas without a festival or an event scheduled, whether it be the Arkansas Goat Festival in Perryville, the World Cheese Dip Championship in Little Rock, the Tontitown Grape Festival, Toad Suck Daze in Conway, or the Gillett Coon Supper.

Tourism is a \$7 billion industry in Arkansas, with nearly 30 million visitors entering the state each year. Much of what makes Arkansas a popular tourist destination—besides our natural amenities and unique places—is our distinctive festivals and events.

Nearly every city and town in our state, large or small, hosts a festival or event aimed at engaging and entertaining locals and attracting visitors. To ensure all of our communities' festivals and events are successful, the Arkansas Festival and Events Association (AFEA) offers a wide variety of support services.

The association hosts an annual conference and trade show, and it provides networking opportunities, publicity assistance, award recognition, cultivates relationships between vendors and event coordinators, maintains a website of all events in the state, hosts educational workshops and seminars, coordinates a mentor program, and Executive Director Jenna Friday maintains a monthly statewide segment on KARK Channel 4 in

Little Rock, where she promotes upcoming festivals and events coordinated by AFEA members.

"The Arkansas Festivals and Events Association and its members believe that festivals and community events are at the foundation of characteristics that distinguish human communities and interaction," Friday said. "Civic events promote civic pride, culture, heritage, economy, and community. The many unique and quality events that take place in Arkansas each year contribute to attracting tourists from surrounding areas and even internationally that want to experience the food, music, recreation, history, and natural beauty of this state."

Recently AFEA hosted its annual conference and trade show in Hot Springs. Sessions covered topics such as: after-event marketing, recycling and sustainability, volunteer management, event photography, outdoor recreation, the impact of arts and culture on small towns, and a food and beverage panel. AFEA also hosted a keynote presentation by Kevin Grothe, vice president of sponsorships at Memphis in May, entitled "Cooking Up Innovative Sponsorship Activations."

Attendees heard from experts like Media Brands of Arkansas Times Limited Partnership Publisher Katherine Daniels and Diamond Agency President Don Hale. Daniels and Hale presided over the after-event marketing session, presenting tips on how to continue your event's success after the event is over. The pair

shared eight “rules of engagement” for event organizers to consider for their next event:

- Send thank you notes and consider giving gifts of thanks to sponsors and volunteers to show your appreciation.
- Prepare and implement a post-event survey to gauge success and identify opportunities for growth.
- Host a post-event focal regroup to bring key stakeholders together for a candid conversation about what did and didn't work during the event.
- Develop offers and opportunities to engage festival and event goers.
- Share contest winners, key moments happening during the festival, and the impact sponsors have on the event.
- Follow up and follow through by creating a list of the unhappy, undone, and unsuccessful. Call the unhappy, complete the undone, and walk away from the unsuccessful.
- Grow your team by reaching out to new faces and embracing new ideas.
- Finally, create a final checklist, a final report of loss and gains, a must-have list and a wish list, and deliver an annual report to key players and investors.

Sessions like the after-event marketing presentation and networking opportunities at the AFEA annual conference and trade show provide immense value to organizers who are always searching for information to improve their events and keep them sustainable and successful.

“Festivals tend to instill community pride and bring people together, but festivals also serve as a unique opportunity to promote the host community,” said Walnut Ridge Mayor Charles E. Snapp. “In the case of Walnut Ridge, the Beatles at the Ridge Music Festival and Symposium has generated an overwhelming amount of publicity that has proven to be the catalyst that kicked off the revitalization of our downtown area.”

To learn more about the Arkansas Festival and Events Association please go to www.arfea.org or email Jenna Friday at jenna@arfea.org.



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