



**News Release**  
**6/18/2020**



## **Lawton's International Festival canceled due to COVID-19**

**Contact:**

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**LAWTON** - After careful deliberation and discussions, the International Festival Committee, the Lawton Arts & Humanities Council, and the City of Lawton have made the difficult decision to cancel the 41<sup>st</sup> annual International Festival for 2020.

This year's festival was scheduled to take place at Elmer Thomas Park from Sept. 25 to Sept. 27. Last year, it drew more than 25-thousand people with over 60 vendors from across the country. The annual three-day fest will now be held on September 24-26, 2021. The festival has been held annually since 1979.

A statement from the International Festival Committee: In canceling the festival, several factors were considered, including public health, city resources, and economic impact. After careful, diligent, and thoughtful consideration and out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of the community - including artists, attendees, vendors, volunteer participants and staff – International Festival will not take place this year.

"It was a difficult decision," said Chair of the International Festival Committee Bobbi Whitson. "It is painful. We know thousands of people will miss the International Festival this year, but it was the only responsible decision. No one has a crystal ball. Yet, given the information we have today, we cannot in good conscience proceed with the festival this year. We do not know what's going to happen regarding COVID-19 come September."

The economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic is also a major factor for not having the event this year. "Since this is a city co-sponsored event, the budget for the City of Lawton has severely suffered, sponsorships have decreased drastically, and even the number of vendor applications are at an all-time low," said Whitson.

Sponsorship for the event is vital and those sponsors have been financially impacted by the ongoing pandemic, which has hammered the state and local economy. Unfortunately, budgets are currently stretched thin. Many sponsors are unable to support the event this year.

There is also a concern for the health of everyone who attends and the 400 festival volunteers who assist with the event. There are too many risk factors that cannot be controlled especially with a mass gathering that occurs during the International Festival.

The committee members stated, by making this decision, they are better placed to conserve their resources, financial and other, for the long-term sustainability for the festival. "We want to be ready and at full strength when it is safe for all to resume outdoor festivals."

###

AUGUST 6, 1901

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
LAWTON!**



CITY HALL

**Lawton Trivia Quiz On Back - Answers Are Inside The Card**



Saturday, June 27  
10:00am – 10:00pm  
Elmer Thomas Park  
3<sup>rd</sup> & NW Ferris Ave  
Lawton, OK



Free Admission  
Free Parking

## Schedule of Events

Subject to Change

Time	Description
10:00am – 2:00pm	Sweet Temptationz Car Show (Registration 8:00am – 10am)
10:00am – 10:00pm	Food, Sales & Activity Vendors including face painting, bounce houses, and more! Note: Some vendors may choose to open later in the day.
10:00am – 6:00pm	Splash Pad
12:00 noon – After Fireworks	Park & Ride! Shuttle service from McMahon Auditorium and Lawton High School.
<b>Amphitheater Stage</b>	
5:00pm – 6:00pm	Hi-Fi Hillbillies, <i>Vintage Rock &amp; Roll</i>
7:30pm – 9:30pm	The 77 <sup>th</sup> US Army Band, <i>Pride of Fort Sill</i>
9:30pm – 9:45pm	Ceremony with Welcome & Remarks
Approximately 9:45pm	<b>One of the largest fireworks displays in Oklahoma set to music!</b> Tune into the live broadcast on MAGIC 95, 95.3FM. Also listen via website, <a href="http://www.magic953.com">www.magic953.com</a> .



**PLEASE NO PETS, SERVICE ANIMALS ONLY – NO PERSONAL FIREWORKS/ALCOHOL/DRONES**



For more information, call Arts & Humanities Division at (580) 581-3470 or (580) 581-3471 or visit [www.lawtonok.gov](http://www.lawtonok.gov) or Facebook "Lawton Fort Sill Freedom Festival"

# Passing Traditions Down For Generations To Come



The 40th International Festival was another successful event in Lawton. This unique three-day cultural celebration brings about a common bond within the community by presenting the traditional music, dance, foods, arts, languages, and crafts of the ethnic communities that make Lawton/Fort Sill their home. The preservation of Lawton's diverse cultural landscape along with the artistic traditions that reflect these cultural views are imperative to sustaining a strong and vibrant community.

Many of the local participating artists have been involved with the International Festival since it began in 1979. The forty-year commitment of these volunteer groups illustrates the importance of the festival as an opportunity to preserve and continue their individual cultures.

Events like this also contribute to both economic and community development. The impact of a thriving arts/cultural community creates a socially connected, sustainable, engaged and collaborative high quality of life which is beneficial in attracting and retaining businesses and workers to a community. The arts help us understand our own unique heritage, pass our traditions down to our children and celebrate our differences and similarities.

*Thank YOU for making the International Festival an extraordinary and positive event for our community! We could not have done it without you!*

## Thank You For 40 Years of Support



Members of the Mexican Folklore Dancers

*International Festival Committee,  
Lawton Arts & Humanities Council,  
Lawton Arts & Humanities Division,  
and City of Lawton*



# LAWTON ARTS & HUMANITIES 2019 CULTURAL AWARDS

FEBRUARY 28, 2020



ALL PHOTOS BY CHRIS MARTIN



# MANDEE THOMAS

## LAWTON ARTS & HUMANITIES EDUCATOR IN THE ARTS

Mandee Thomas began working for Lawton Public Schools in 2003. While at LPS, she developed a program entitled EnLIVEN! which integrates the performing and visual arts into core subjects to enhance student achievement. Mandee is certified in Mid-Level Language Arts, Reading, History, General Music, Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Mandee transferred to Cache Public Schools this past August but taught 4th and 5th grade Gifted and Talented students for LPS from 2013 until May 2019. Mandee also works as a Fellow for the Oklahoma development to network schools during the school year and at conferences in July.

She is an active volunteer with the Lawton Community Theatre, not only as a performer but also directing and helping with fundraising efforts. She and her entire family have been a great gift to the Lawton Community Theatre by performing, directing, ushering, and contributing with their participation and their generosity.

Mandee is also a talented singer and actor, appearing in many LCT productions including: Yente in "Fiddler on the Roof" in 2006, Agnes in "Dancing at Lughnasa", Gertrude McFuzz in "Seussical", Grace in "Annie," and as Maria in the 2012 production of "The Sound of Music." Last year, she played Annie Sullivan in the LCT production of "The Miracle Worker." She has also worked with Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma City Repertory Theatre. She performed on the Civic Center main stage in Lyric's 2014 production of "Les Miserables" and again with Lyric in their July 2019 production of "Titanic." She was also an ensemble member of City Rep's September 2018 concert production of "The Music Man" starring Broadway veterans Jonathan Beck Reed and Teri Bibb. She has also performed with Lawton Pro Musica and has been an instructor for the Lawton Ballet Theatre's Student Showcase.

Mandee was the recipient of the 2012 Lawton Cultural Awards for Artist of the Year.

