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Community Involvement in Weatherford

Linda Dixon

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joint effort



Community Involvement

The formation of the Arts and Humanities Committee of the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce began in the fall of 1973 through the efforts of local artist Shirley Belanger. She felt that Weatherford had the potential for hosting an annual arts festival. With the help of John Fowler, then the manager of the Chamber of Commerce, she assembled information and sent it to the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Soon a grant was provided to start the festival. The Committee was formed and work started. Committee members spent many hours visiting other communities that had hosted arts festivals, studying the judging procedures and gathering information to organize the

festival. They compiled a list of prospective artists and mailed invitations to them. Weatherford's first Arts Festival was held on April 27, 1974 in downtown Weatherford on Custer Street between Main and Franklin. Purchase awards were available, box lunches were planned for artists, and performing arts were featured. Flower carts and balloons gave a festive appearance to the area. Several years later, the Arts Festival was moved to Means-Clark Park and was held in the fall.

The second Saturday in September is the date set aside each year for Weatherford's Annual Southwest Festival of the Arts. It has grown to be one of the largest in the area with over 150 artists and craftsmen participating. Many concessions

are offered, performing artists entertain, and a workshop is available for children.

The Arts and Humanities Committee is formed in January of each year and begins working to prepare for the September Festival. The organizational structure includes a Chairman, Co-Chairman, and eighteen sub-committee chairmen who coordinate the efforts to organize this outstanding event. It takes approximately 200 volunteers, along with employees of the City of Weatherford, working together to make the festival a success.

The Commercial Art Department at Southwestern is invited to participate in the design of the invitation cover going out to all potential artists and craftsmen. There is one



In Weatherford

By Linda Dixon



winner with a \$50 cash prize donated by the Weatherford Board of Realtors. The winning design is also used for various publicity needs of the Festival Committee. The Weatherford Public Schools are called upon to design the publicity poster and the program cover. Prize money for this contest is also donated by the Weatherford Board of Realtors.

The profits made from the Arts Festival are used for promoting the Arts and Humanities within the community. The greatest percentage is used to sponsor art workshops in the

Weatherford Public Schools. Those individuals and places of business that donate prize money to the Festival are greatly appreciated. They enable the Festival to be self-sustaining without having to rely on grants or other outside means of support.

Every year, the Arts Festival grows and continues to improve in quality. It's a privilege for Weatherford to be able to host this year's sixteenth annual Southwest Festival of the Arts. The date will be September 7, 1989 from 9:00 to 5:00. The Festival is a major community



Photos courtesy of Weatherford Daily News



involvement, one of which all of us can be proud. We must all be thankful for our "Festival Pioneers" Shirley Belanger, John Fowler, and the many other volunteers who worked to present the first arts festival.

LINDA DIXON is the wife of Weatherford physician Tom Dixon. The Dixons have lived in Weatherford since September, 1981. They have two children, Elizabeth and Jeff, who attend Weatherford Public Schools. With Jack Smith, Mrs. Dixon was Co-Chairman of the 1988 Festival of the Arts. ■



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