

## **AFTER 20 YEARS, WE SAY GOODBYE TO OUR BELOVED RENOFEST BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL**

Hartsville's 2017 RenoFest Bluegrass Festival held in March of 2017 was a huge success. Large crowds attended all festival events and box office sales were the largest in the festival's 20 year history.

Our 2017 festival featured Ronnie Reno and his band, "The Reno Tradition," Ronnie's brothers Dale and Wayne and their band, "Reno and Harrell," IBMA's 2017 Band of the Year, "Flatt Lonesome," and Wayne Henderson and "The Virginia Louthians." All other events during the 2017 festival, including the 2017 Bluegrass Band, Guitar and Banjo Contests, were superbly entertaining.

Notwithstanding the success enjoyed by RenoFest in 2017 festival, we have reluctantly decided that it is time to say goodbye to our beloved RenoFest Bluegrass Festival. While this was a most painful decision, we can proudly say that RenoFest ends its 20 year run on a very high note in every sense.

RenoFest was named for South Carolina bluegrass legend, Don Reno, whose son, Ronnie Reno and his band have served as our host band every year for 20 years. In truth, RenoFest would never have existed without Ronnie's strong support and professional assistance. Thank you, Ronnie, for all you did for RenoFest! You are a true gentleman, an ambassador extraordinaire for bluegrass music, and loyal friend.

To everyone who ever attended or participated in promoting and presenting RenoFest through the years, we give you our sincerest "Thank You!" Whether you supported RenoFest as a fan, participant, performer, sponsor, worker or volunteer, you helped RenoFest shine a very bright and shining light on our beloved Hartsville for all the world to come, see and enjoy.

Because of your efforts, the world did come, they did see, and they did enjoy Hartsville very much. Through your efforts, you made RenoFest ***"The Best Little Bluegrass Festival in the Best Little Town in America!"***

RenoFest was created by Russ & Billie Jordan and Rob Jordan in 1998. Fortunately for Hartsville, The Jordans were persuaded to make downtown Hartsville the home of their new festival.

In 1999, Hartsville Downtown Development Association (HDDA) led by Judi Elvington, adopted RenoFest to promote downtown Hartsville. With encouragement of community leaders like City Manager Bill Bruton, Curtis

Tyner, Joyce Beasley, and Dick Porter, Judi worked tirelessly for RenoFest and grew it from a one day concert into a three day festival filled with musical events.

After Judi Elvington retired, Lenora Lafew continued leading HDDA's operation of RenoFest. Several years later, Black Creek Arts Council (BCAC) and its director Allison Pederson, with the assistance of BCAC's Susan Atkins and Jim Money, took over the operation of RenoFest. All members of HDDA and BCAC worked hard to assure the continued success of RenoFest.

In addition to the persons named above, a multitude of volunteers worked tirelessly to make RenoFest a huge success. One such volunteer was the late Ed Guest. Without any doubt, Ed was the best friend RenoFest ever had.

Ed and his beloved Anne spent countless hours and days every year promoting RenoFest and doing whatever task, chore or errand was necessary to make the upcoming RenoFest a success. Rest High On That Mountain, Brother Ed!

And we can never forget the great virtuoso dobro player and true bluegrass gentleman, Rocky Springs. Rocky cheerfully served RenoFest in so many ways - as a volunteer, program emcee, and performer.

Our hearts were broken in 2009 when Rocky suddenly left this world at the age of 50 while he was performing on the Center Theater stage during a RenoFest concert. Rest High On That Mountain, Brother Rocky!

Many other volunteers worked long hours year after year to make RenoFest the best it could be. These volunteers include: Lynda Weatherford, Bob Bragdon, Nancy Driggers, Jackie Thomas, Bill & Peggy (Rest her Soul) Andrews, Susan Covington, Charlie Caulder, Marty Brand, Ken Hughes, Steve Peavy, Craig & Anne (Rest her Soul) England, Charles (Rest his Soul) & Mae Griffiths, Harry & Wayne Wallace, Smitty (Rest his Soul) & Linda Smith, and Vern & Nancy Myers.

Other multi-year volunteers include: Chet Polson, Fairley Guest, Dawn Fraser. Paul Peterson, Johnny Andrews, Madge Zemp, Carroll (Rest his Soul) & Betty Taylor, Jeff Bryant, Jimmie Perkins, Katie Thomas, Sharman Poplava, James Clemons, Marty Brand, Linda George, Elaine Mahn, Judi Haeni (Rest her Soul), Frank & Frankie Bush, Ardie Arvidson, Jimmie Perkins, Andy Williams, Southeastern Bluegrass Association Members and Rivertown Bluegrass Society Members. The Center Theater's Kim Cranford always worked hard to welcome our RenoFest guests.

We also thank all of the many private donors from our community, who annually contributed to Renofest as Sponsors and Patrons. RenoFest's benefactors included: Heritage Community Bank, Sonoco Products Co., First Citizens Bank, West Oil Company (Markette Convenience Stores), Driggers Law Firm, Hill & Jordan, CPA's and Bob & Violet Bragdon.

And also, Mike & Christina Baxley, Pepsi Cola of Florence, Edward Jones/Ed Melton, Duke Energy, Minnie's Giftique, SPC Credit Union, Patti & Jim Shelley, Bill Segars & Segars Construction Company, Landmark Inn, Pam's Restaurant, Sonic Drive-In, Yogi Bear Chicken, Frets & Necks Music Store, Mutual Savings Bank, Jim & Pam Cox and Chandler & Martha Peel.

We especially thank the City of Hartsville, the County of Darlington and the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism for their logistical, administrative, grant support and other assistance through the years.

The City and County both realized the importance of supporting and assisting RenoFest due to the significant economic impact RenoFest brought to the City and the County each year. They both always appreciated how much RenoFest promoted the City and the County to a host of tourists who came to the festival each year.

In making the lists set forth above, we acknowledge that we did not list everyone who contributed to RenoFest over the past 20 years. To each of you, we sincerely apologize and thank each of you for all you did for RenoFest.

RenoFest attracted thousands of bluegrass fans and musicians from across America, who came to Hartsville to compete in RenoFest's highly regarded band, guitar and banjo contests, and to enjoy the outstanding bluegrass music concerts Russ & Billie Jordan brought to the festival each year.

The economic impact of RenoFest to Hartsville and Darlington County was undeniable. Since 1998, RenoFest has filled every hotel in Hartsville with bluegrass fans from every corner of America. Hotel accommodations taxes and restaurant hospitality taxes peaked each year during RenoFest.

During its 20 year run, RenoFest became the second largest tourist attraction in the County, second to the Southern 500 Race. Over the years, RenoFest earned tourism grants and donations of more than \$500,000.

For the past 20 years, the streets of downtown Hartsville have been filled each springtime during RenoFest with the

sweet and lively sounds of stringed instruments, played with great gusto and passion by young and old musicians alike.

More Americans attend bluegrass festivals than all other musical events combined. In time, RenoFest became famous as the first bluegrass festival each year to begin America's annual bluegrass festival season. Due to the popularity of RenoFest, Hartsville is now recognized as one of America's authentic "Music Cities."

The passing of RenoFest is symptomatic of current times. It has become too difficult for a small charitable organization to enlist and sustain sufficient volunteers each year to operate an event that is as large as RenoFest has become. Likewise, it has become too difficult to raise sufficient funds, year after year, to maintain and sustain the high quality event that RenoFest became famous for.

Since it is no longer possible to enlist adequate personnel to operate the festival or to sustain the high quality everyone has come to expect from RenoFest, the decision was made to allow our beloved RenoFest to fade gracefully into the sunset as a beautiful moment in time that we will always fondly remember.

Thanks RenoFest, for giving all of us so many great memories to cherish and remember you by. We will never forget you and what you did for Hartsville.

**MAY THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN.**

Marty Driggers, RenoFest Volunteer