

TEXAS HERITAGE LIVING HISTORY WEEKEND 2005

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Texas Heritage Living History Weekend¹ is the annual community education project produced by the Texas Heritage Music Foundation (THMF) and is held each September, free to the public, at the Robbins-Lewis Pavilion on the campus of Schreiner University in Kerrville. This year's three day event will be held September 23-25, 2005, while its accompanying educational outreach project, *The In School Performers Program*, will begin in October and will run through the month of January, 2006.

In less than eight years, Texas Heritage Living History Weekend has grown from a *single day* event into a *semester-long* 'interactive' educational program that teaches and encourages young adults and children (primarily at-risk) to learn and understand the rich heritage of Texas, its history, and the varied cultures brought here by the immigrants who settled Texas more than 150 years ago. Since its 1997 inception, the Texas Heritage Living History programming has impacted over 15,000 youths from throughout the Hill Country and central/south Texas.

OBJECTIVE

Texas Heritage Living History Weekend's primary goal is to teach children from rural and inner city schools the rich historical heritage of Texas, its varied peoples and cultures, and its traditions in literature, music and storytelling. It is an especially unique opportunity to expose at-risk youth to the arts, culture, and music of early Texas pioneers, settlers, immigrants and indigenous peoples. It is our belief that this will provide youth with opportunities to develop creativity, learn the tools of communication and create multiple solutions to problems. This event offers a universal language that cuts across disciplines and cultural diversity to bring more coherent meaning to their world. Our goal is to help instill pride and self-assuredness in today's youth, at-risk or otherwise, with a continued education about the diversity of our heritage, culture and people.

Currently, Texas Heritage Living History Weekend is the *only* cultural educational programming of its type in the central Texas/Hill Country area that is (a) *open to the general public*; (b) *provides funding to schools and agencies for transportation to and from the event*; (c) *places performers and oral historians in schools to give lessons on Texas' diverse culture, heritage and history*; and (d) *is free of charge*.

Priority elements of the Texas Heritage Living History Weekend:

- **Unique and varied programming that is educational and accessible.**

The event includes Old West and Native American demonstrators and re-enactment groups; authentic chuck wagons and teepees; noted storytellers, poets and authors; nature conservancy demonstrators; historical exhibits; and numerous staging areas featuring heritage music performers and songwriters. The number of Living History Weekend exhibitors, musicians, and demonstrators has increased each year since

¹ Originally produced as *Texas Heritage Living History Day* from 1997 to 2003. The name change reflects the event's expanded format that was introduced in 2001.

the event's inception. For example, the 2000 edition of Texas Heritage Living History Day hosted thirty-nine (39) performers, as well as special programming from The Institute of Texan Cultures, The Cowboy Artists of America Museum, and Fredericksburg's Pioneer Museum. By 2004, this roster had expanded to more than fifty performers, exhibits and demonstrators. More than 50 performers and educators will be scheduled for Texas Heritage Living History Weekend 2005.

Each year's lineup of performers is listed on the Texas Heritage Music Foundation's website, www.texasheritagemusic.org. The foundation's website also contains downloadable educational materials including classroom discussion topics and activities, suggested readings and recordings.

- **Subsidized transportation to the event for rural schools and urban youth-at-risk programs and academies.**

In 2000, seed funds were granted to THMF to help subsidize transportation costs to the event for rural and in-need schools. Seven out-of-town schools representing more than 300 students and teachers were able to attend the event due to this unique offering. From 2001-2003, the transportation grant program had enabled on average ten out-of-town schools representing more than 800 students and teachers (nearly half were youth-at-risk academies from San Antonio and south Texas) to attend. More than 1000 students and teachers participated in this unique travel subsidy program for Living History Weekend 2004. Due to the success of this program, an even greater emphasis will be put on expanding subsidized travel for at-risk youth academies from urban areas for LHW 2005 and beyond.

- **In-school performances and demonstrations during the semester following the event.**

Although THMF offers subsidized transportation to the event, we also recognize that many schools still cannot attend due to scheduling conflicts, etc. To overcome this, we expanded the Texas Heritage Living History Weekend programming in 2001 to include, not exclude, these schools. Since 2001, we have placed performers in eight different schools and settings *each year* during the fall semester following Texas Heritage Living History Weekend (one performer per school). Plans are in place to expand the In School Performers Program during each year of the event.

- **Three-hour seminar examining ways of integrating music, writing, and storytelling into the contemporary classroom.**

THMF Executive Director Dr. Kathleen Hudson moderates a panel discussion on the power of music and storytelling, and its need for inclusion in everyday curricula. The panel is made up each year to include noted authors and Texas Heritage educators. To be held on Saturday, September 24 at Schreiner University, the seminar will include presentations important to area educators, historians and scholars.

- **Other highlights**

Each year, attendance at Texas Heritage Living History Weekend has steadily increased by an average of ten percent (10%). Attendance for Texas Heritage Living History Weekend 2000 was approximately 1300 teachers, students and at-risk youth. General public attendance figures accounted for an additional 300 attendees. However, due to the new expanded programming format, Texas Heritage Living History Weekend 2001 saw attendance reach a total of 2500 people, of which approximately 2200 were teachers, students, and at-risk youth. The total attendance for 2002 exceeded 2700 students and teachers, while the combined audiences for 2003 *and* 2004 exceeded 3400 students and teachers each year.

SUMMARY

With a track record of success beginning in 1987, THMF is not interested in just *repeating* a successful event such as Texas Heritage Living History Weekend. We are committed to creative *innovation* and *growth*. Each year, we find new ways to bring stories and songs to the community, to the educational system, and to children and young adults who are deemed “at risk”. THMF is committed to the belief that telling stories and singing songs do make a difference in the lives of everyone, *especially our youth*.