



Wichita Festivals, Inc.
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RIVERFEST 2020 CANCELED AMID COVID-19 CONCERNS

March 31, 2020 – WICHITA, Kan. – Ty Tabing, president/CEO of Wichita Festivals, Inc., joined by Sedgwick County Commissioner Lacey Cruse and Vice-Mayor Cindy Claycomb, today announced that due to increasing concerns about Coronavirus (COVID-19), Riverfest 2020 will not take place. The organization instead is planning a four-day, fall-themed community event in downtown, a dynamic final celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of both Wichita and Sedgwick County.

“When you’re the biggest event in the state with a large economic impact on the local community, it takes longer to assess and coordinate with local public health officials,” said Ty Tabing, president/CEO of WFI, the 501c3 not-for-profit organization that produces Riverfest. “We’ve been very thoughtful about this decision and are doing the right thing as a matter of public health and safety, and there is no higher priority.”

The decision came after communication with the City of Wichita and Sedgwick County officials. This is the first time in the history of Kansas’ largest community event that Riverfest has not taken place as scheduled. The festival represents an annual impact of \$30 million on the Wichita economy. WFI staff was preparing for the 49th festival (scheduled for May 29-June 6) when it was decided that in the best interest of public safety the festival would be canceled.

“This is an unfortunate development that will continue to impact our community in multiple ways,” Sedgwick County Commissioner Lacey Cruse said. “But, this decision by Riverfest officials is the responsible and the right thing to do. It is important we continue to ensure the safety of residents and visitors in the community.”

“We are seeing major festivals across the country and around the world making the difficult but compassionate decision to cancel, in order to protect at-risk citizens from COVID-19,” Tabing said. “There is no question that this is the right thing to do, but there are a lot of tough emotions attached ... for our dedicated volunteers, our staff and of course, for Riverfest fans, some of whom won’t be spending the first week of summer at Riverfest for the first time in decades.”

Coachella, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the Kentucky Derby, SXSW and Tribeca Film Festival are just a handful of iconic events throughout the U.S. that have been cancelled or postponed. Due to a number of factors, it will not be possible to reschedule Riverfest 2020.

“As a long-established event that takes place over nine days, there are a number of challenges when it comes to rescheduling,” Tabing said. “Downtown Wichita is more vibrant than ever with outdoor

events throughout the year. It's nearly impossible to find a nine-day timespan that can accommodate Riverfest. We also have to take into consideration our many partners— local businesses, vendors and fellow not-for-profits, for instance—who may be involved with other events already scheduled in late summer and early fall. Riverfest is a complicated animal, and under these circumstances, with the recommendations received from Gov. Laura Kelly and our Sedgwick County officials, we will do what's best for our fellow citizens, and turn our focus to other projects at this time.”

In addition to Autumn & Art at Bradley Fair scheduled for Sept. 18-20, WFI staff is currently working on a large-scale, community party—a high-energy salute to the 150th anniversary of the founding of both Wichita and Sedgwick County. The downtown event is scheduled for Nov. 5-8, with St. Francis street at the heart of the festival. Fidelity Bank River Run is one of a select number of Riverfest 2020 events that will take place during the fall event. KAKE TouchATruck and the Wichita Eagle Medallion Hunt will also take place at the festival, along with a number of new events and activities—some autumn-inspired, some highlighting Wichita's vibrant arts and music scenes, and all to celebrate the spirit and citizens of Wichita and Sedgwick County.

“In 1970, Wichita's 100th birthday party inspired the annual celebration known as Riverfest,” said Vice-Mayor Claycomb. “Who knows what might grow from this celebration of important city and county milestones—and the powerful resilience of our citizens?”

For the many Riverfest fans (last year 440,000 attended the festival) who will be longing for their favorite festival events May 29-June 6, WFI staff is planning Virtual Riverfest 2020, featuring some nods to your favorite classic events, live fun and entertainment, and chances to share your Riverfest memories, all via Wichita Riverfest's social media channels. More details about Virtual Riverfest 2020 will be available at WichitaRiverfest.com May 1.

“It's important that Wichita know that we will be here for them when this is over, to continue the traditions we've established, bringing citizens together to celebrate our wonderful city,” Tabing said.

Riverfest fans with questions should see the FAQ list at WichitaRiverfest.com.

About Wichita Festivals, Inc.: *Wichita Festivals, Inc. is a non-profit corporation with the purpose of creating diverse community celebrations within the Wichita community. The primary events produced by Wichita Festivals, Inc. are Riverfest, Bob Struble Memorial Golf Tournament (September 11, 2020) and Autumn & Art at Bradley Fair (September 18-20, 2020). For more information about Wichita Festivals, Inc. or its events, contact Teri Mott at (316) 267-2817 or teri@wichitafestivals.com.*

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