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Event organizers announce cancellations, plans for virtual celebrations

HVAB says Happy Valley remains an ideal post-COVID-19 destination

STATE COLLEGE, PA, April 17, 2020 – Happy Valley Adventure Bureau President and CEO Fritz Smith today led a Zoom news conference at which organizers of Central PA 4th Fest, Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, People’s Choice Festival, and Philipsburg Heritage Days, announced the mutual decision to cancel their respective events as a result of lingering COVID-19 impacts and concerns.

“We know these decisions were extremely difficult to make,” said HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith. “They are equally as difficult for local residents, participants and visitors who look forward to these events year after year to absorb. However, they were necessary decisions. Our community will remain resilient as we celebrate perhaps a little bit differently this year.”

Organizers – who agreed early on to make the decision as a group – said the logistics of continued planning within a fluid environment, along with uncertainties about the status of large group gatherings by mid-summer were the driving factors behind the decisions.

“The mission of the Central PA 4th Fest is to celebrate our nation’s birthday. It doesn’t matter if you are Democrat or Republican, what church you attend or don’t attend, what nationality you are - it’s where we ALL come together to celebrate our Nation’s birth,” said 4th Fest President Kurt Weibel. “That can never be cancelled by anything, including COVID-19. In a unified and concerted effort to keep our country, our region, and its people healthy and strong, we are taking a moment to pause until July 4th, 2021.”

Weibel said until people can gather again in 2021, 4thFest is looking at virtual celebrations this year with the possibility of a virtual 4K race, virtual parade and/or live streaming of the history of the Central PA 4th Fest.

Rick Bryant, Executive Director of the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, said organizers remained hopeful to be able to proceed with this year's event, which draws more than 100,000 people to downtown State College. However, after thorough discussion and guidance from state and local officials, Bryant said it became clear that the best course of action was to cancel.

"We know what an economic driver the festival is for the region, but the safety of our artists, performers, and audience members was foremost in our mind as we made this decision," Bryant said. "I know people who have been very sick. COVID-19 is not something to trifle with. We're looking forward to the time when we can all gather together safely again. It will be the best festival ever."

People's Choice Festival Co-Directors John Madison and Cindy Rockey said after a great deal of consideration, the committee made the decision to cancel this year's event, due, of course, to continuing concerns about the spread of COVID-19.

"At this point, none of us knows how long we will be under stay-at-home orders, and although canceling the festival is heartbreaking for us all, we feel we have no real viable choice," Madison and Rockey said. "This was a decision none of us wanted to make. We love the People's Choice Festival, but even more, we love our visitors and our vendors. And that's why, for the first time in the Festival's 28-year history, we have decided to cancel this year's event."

Madison and Rockey said the committee is pleased that there's a genuine spirit of cooperation and unity with colleagues at the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, 4thFest, and Philipsburg Heritage Days, as well as the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau in the difficult decisions to cancel the respective events this summer, in the interest of public health and safety.

"We'll be back, bigger and better than ever. We'll see you in July 2021," they said.

Jim Pollock, President and Committee Chair of Philipsburg Heritage Days, said the closure of schools for the academic year impacted the festival parade and festival, which serves as a community homecoming.

"Obviously, one of the main concerns was the health and safety of our vendors and our many visitors," Pollock said. "This year's theme was to be 'Be True to Your School' showcasing the Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District and the advancement and changes that have taken place over the years. Closing the schools affected all the events we had planned throughout the week to highlight the various organizations and clubs and their activities."

Pollock said since Philipsburg Heritage Days runs the same time that three other events happen in Centre County, organizers felt it was prudent to participate with the others in making a collective decision.

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State College Spikes General Manager and Chair of the HVAB Marketing Committee Scott Walker offered that while he is saddened that The Central PA 4th Fest, People's Choice Festival, Philipsburg Heritage Days and the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts will be cancelled for 2020, he joins in applauding organizers for keeping the public health of the community at the forefront where it belongs.

“Both the Spikes and The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau greatly value our partnerships with these organizations and their extremely crucial community events here in Happy Valley, and we look forward to each of them returning bigger and better than ever in 2021,” Walker said.

Smith said the HVAB and event organizers will continue dialogue about possible virtual events and other ways to ensure that residents and future visitors can experience these signature events in some way.

In addition, the HVAB continues to focus on welcoming visitors to Happy Valley this summer.

“We are ready and waiting for the pivot,” Smith said. “Our major events will not take place this summer; we were somewhat expecting that scenario and preparing for it as much as one can. There are many wonderful reasons to visit Happy Valley. We have bountiful outdoor recreation; beautiful gardens and museums, history, a thriving craft beverage scene, wonderful restaurants and farm-to-table dining options that will appeal to individuals and families in need of a getaway once stay-at-home orders are lifted and it’s safe to travel.”

Smith said expectations that domestic travel rebounds first, and that people will likely opt for regional travel and stay closer to home, bodes well for Happy Valley.

“We have a destination that will be particularly desirable to travelers post-COVID,” he said. “This is our message, and as soon as it is appropriate to deliver that message, we will do so.”

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