



Mississippi Earthtones Festival Returns To Liberty Bank Amphitheater On Sept. 17

by Sara McGibany

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ALTON - The Mississippi Earthtones Festival, presented by Alton Main Street and the Sierra Club, is a celebration of our river through art, music, and conservation. The 16th Annual event will be held at Liberty Bank Alton Amphitheater on Saturday, September 17th from 12:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., and there is no charge for admission.

This year's theme is Amplify the River, and local artists have been commissioned to build large installations that will enhance the festival grounds. The Riverbend Yarn Bombers are knitting & crocheting a colorful textile sculpture that will encompass the fountain at Riverfront Park, entitled "Eyes on the River". Kooliverse will present eye-opening artworks of wonder and intrigue, including a 16-foot kaleidoscope. An amazing light show is in store from local projection artists, and there will be a meet and greet with a river mermaid.

Jacoby Arts Center has lined up an amazing art playground of performances and interactive experiences, featuring live painting, dance & flag performances, aerial arts, pole acrobatics, hoop spinning, stilt walking, hydro dipping, free body painting, and a community ceramics project. A big top tent will provide a shady "Zen Zone" coordinated by Soul Sanctuary, featuring yoga classes, guided meditation, chair massages, and a flow workshop for poi spinners.

Wind-powered live music will fill the air throughout the day. The entertainment line-up on the main stage will feature: Loftys Comet (Alternative Indie Jazz) from 12:00-2:00, Nonstop Reggae Band from 3:00-6:00, Jake's Leg (Grateful Dead Tribute) from 7:00-10:00, and between each act will be a performance by Jason "Gordo" Gordon (1-Man, 10-Piece Band) from 2:00-3:00 and 6:00-7:00. ASL interpreting will be provided by Gateway Interpreting Services.

A variety of fun and educational activities are planned for families from 12:00-6:00, and there will be several agencies and companies on hand to teach consumers how to incorporate more sustainable practices into their daily lives. The Sierra Club will have an informational booth on pollinators and clean energy, as well as a watershed model table for kids and a children's painting booth that will contribute to a large MEF sculpture. "This year's event offers strong education components that are working towards a sustainable future, especially as it relates to the Mississippi River," says Christine Favilla, Three Rivers Project Co-Coordinator for Alton's Sierra Club, "The Alton Piasa Palisades Group of the Sierra Club is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year, so be sure to check out the citizen action items you can take at this festival!"

The Alton Museum of History & Art will present information on the history of the Mississippi River and exploration in our area at large, including a fossil identification activity. Visit the National Great Rivers Research & Education Center booth to learn about big river research and see an interactive trash timeline. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources will offer their interactive Wildlife Trailer for kids.

Park rangers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Rivers Project, volunteers from the National Great Rivers Museum, and staff from the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary will discuss environmental stewardship and navigation along the Mississippi

River and share about educational and outreach programming that encourages our community to engage with their public lands. At their booth, you'll also enjoy water safety games and giveaways, and an overview of the Melvin Price Locks and Dam.

As part of its IMG GIVES BACK program, Imperial Manufacturing Group is holding a collection drive for jackets, hats, gloves, and blankets for those in need; the first 25 donations will receive a recycled backpack IMG cooler. The Better Building Institute will teach about energy efficiency, zero-energy home building, and energy audits. You can learn about installing solar panels at your home or business with Midwest Solar Solutions. Visit V Salon by Valerie's BoHo booth to get your hair braided with tinsel for \$5 and purchase vegan, organic, biodegradable hair care products.

Dozens of local artisans will offer nature-inspired, hand-made, and environmentally-friendly wares. You'll find wearable art such as tie-dyes, knit and crocheted items, leatherwork, handmade pet accessories, and upcycled jewelry. A variety of handmade all-natural soap and handcrafted body care products will be available, and you'll also find unique home décor, bird feeders, nature-themed artwork, photography, products made with local honey, woodworking items, thrifted clothing, hemp products, eco-friendly scrubs, and plants.

At 3:00 on the Main Stage, three local champions for the environment will be presented with the Confluence Conservation Leadership Award: Dr. Connie Frey Spurlock, Rachel Lappin, and Emily Ehley.

Come hungry because there will be a great selection of local food & beverages on site from The Old Bakery Beer Company, Gentelin's on Broadway, Big Boys Q, The Rivers Vedge, Team Honduras, Taqueria Los Toros, BHB Mobile Kitchen, Foxes Boxes, Flourish Farm, CJ's Juicery, Idle Roasting Co., Bubba Grump Smoked Pretzels and 3 Sisters Tea, Apothecary & Yoga Studio.

A few volunteer shifts remain on September 17th at the festival grounds, and anyone who pitches in will receive a free festival t-shirt. Volunteers can also participate in the MEF River Clean Up, which will take place the following Saturday, Sept. 24th. Boats will ferry volunteers to clean up riverbanks and islands from 9 am-12 pm, and pre-registration is required to reserve your seat. Over 45 tons of trash have been removed from the Mississippi River during MEF clean-ups to date. Volunteers can register online for both options at www.DowntownAlton.com/Events.

“We look forward to filling our riverfront with a celebration of the beautiful Mississippi River,” said Sara McGibany, Executive Director of Alton Main Street, adding “This event attracts the most wonderful attendees who are passionate about protecting Alton’s greatest natural asset.”

This festival is held annually on the third Saturday in September as part of the State of Illinois' "It's Our River Day" initiative to celebrate Illinois watersheds through education, recreation, and conservation. Alton's free community river celebration would not be possible without the generosity of our community. Alton Main Street and the Sierra Club express their sincere appreciation to the following local businesses and organizations for supporting the event: the City of Alton, Village of Godfrey, Madison County Resource Management, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, Simmons Hanly Conroy, Lewis & Clark Community College Sustainability Department, Illinois Natural History Survey Great Rivers Field Station, Illinois American Water, AltonWorks, Giant City Properties, Argosy Casino Alton, Republic Services, 3As Sign Language Interpreting Services, Gateway Interpreting Services, Cope Plastics, The Old Bakery Beer Company, Chiro One Wellness Centers, Renewal by Andersen, Kooliverse, Jacoby Arts Center, Imperial Manufacturing, Taqueria Los Toros, Theodora Farms, Midwest Solar Solutions, Bright Star Uniform Shop, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The Telegraph, Riverbender.com, WBGZ Radio, and AdVantage.

For more information, please visit www.DowntownAlton.com. To stay up-to-date on announcements, please visit: www.facebook.com/EarthtonesFestival.