

# 34th Annual Olde Alton Arts and Craft Fair to Welcome 200 Crafters from Across the Midwest

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - The 34th Annual Olde Alton Arts and Craft Fair will invite almost 200 crafters to sell their wares on Dec. 2–3, 2023.

Community members are encouraged to stop by Alton High School throughout the weekend to start their Christmas shopping and support local artisans and the Alton Band

and Orchestra Builders (ABOB). ABOB is a nonprofit that promotes the music program at Alton Community Unit School District #11 (ACUSD11).

“Alton is known for its musical program in the area, and ABOB is happy to support that,” said ABOB member and fair organizer Dave Fritz. “This is truly a craft fair. We do ask that our crafters — and I’m very conscious about using that word: our crafters, not vendors, but our crafters — their products are at least 51% handmade. So it’s truly a craft fair, and we try to maintain that.”

Fritz said there’s a “wide variety” of crafts, many of which are Christmas-themed. Jewelry, wood art, recycled art and wreaths are just a few of the items guaranteed to be there on Dec. 2 and 3.

Many of the crafters come to Alton from across Illinois and Missouri, but there are a few crafters who travel from as far away as Wisconsin, Tennessee, Kentucky and Texas to be a part of the fair. Fritz believes the fair has been so successful because it prioritizes handmade crafts and draws wide support from the Riverbend community.

“We’ve had some wonderful predecessors that started the fair 34 years ago,” Fritz said. “They really laid the groundwork for it and made the show what it is. We’ve just rolled with their model and tried to provide a great venue for our crafters... We ask that the community come out and support the crafters that come out because as I’ve learned over the years working with these crafters, this is their business. It’s not simply a hobby. It’s really their business, their livelihood, so it’s great that the community comes out and supports these crafters.”

Admission to the fair is \$3 on Saturday, Dec. 2 and \$2 on Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023. Kids under 12 are free. ABOB will serve breakfast and lunch on both days. All proceeds from admissions and food will go toward the organization. The crafters rent their space from ABOB, but ABOB does not take any percentage of their sales for the weekend.

For Head Band Director Blake Korte, ABOB’s work is invaluable. The organization provides uniforms and instruments, and they help offset traveling costs and other expenses so Alton’s music program can thrive.

“Sometimes the arts kind of fall by the wayside as far as financial support goes, so we’re really, really lucky and blessed to have ABOB there with us to support us along the way,” Korte said. “We can’t thank ABOB support enough. This craft fair is huge for us. It’s our biggest fundraiser of the year so we can provide quality instruction and quality instruments for all the students who wish to be involved in the great program we have.”

His students agree. Most of them have been a part of the ACUSD11 music program since the fourth grade, and they describe the program as “a little family.” Some of the student musicians have plans to continue their education after high school as music minors in college or music education teachers like Korte. The students will also be volunteering at the craft fair, and they have a few favorite crafters-turned-friends who they can’t wait to see year after year.

“Overall, Alton stands above the rest,” Korte said. “We have really great family and community support. Like I’ve said before, we have really excellent, hardworking students that make the job worth coming to every day, day in and day out.”

The music program is made possible through the work of Korte, his fellow teachers and ABOB, which is celebrating its 75th year. Fritz remembers playing in Alton’s band and orchestra and selling grapefruits for ABOB when he was an ACUSD11 student. Now, the Olde Alton Arts and Craft Fair is ABOB’s main fundraiser to keep the music program thriving.

To support this mission, stop by the Olde Alton Arts and Craft Fair from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023, or 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023, at Alton High School. Fritz and Korte encourage community members to [visit ABOB.net](https://www.abob.net) for [more information about the craft fair](#) and the music program at ACUSD11, including [upcoming performances](#).

“They really are a fantastic group year after year,” Fritz added. “Come on out, start your Christmas season if you haven’t started already. It’s a great way to be a part of the community and start off the Christmas season.”