

45 Years and Counting...

by Joe Herring



The Kerrville Folk Festival begins May 26, and runs through June 12 this year -- 18 full days of great music at Quiet Valley Ranch.

Founded in 1972 as a part of the festivities surrounding the Texas State Arts and Crafts Fair, the folk festival has seen many changes in its history. The late Rod Kennedy produced the festival for many years, and it is now produced by the very capable Dalis Allen. The festival is overseen by a diverse board of directors from several states.



Ladybird and Lyndon Johnson at the very first Kerrville Folk Festival, back in 1972.

If your experience is like mine, whenever I tell people where I'm from, especially people from Texas, the first thing they mention is the Kerrville Folk Festival.

The festival is widely known, and it makes a giant economic impact on our community. During its eighteen day run, tens of thousands of visitors stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, buy gasoline and groceries, and spend money. The tax revenues from their visits help fund needed projects in our city and county, and we all benefit from the event.

Strangely, though, our community tends to turn its back on the festival. I have noticed, when reminding audiences or meetings of the upcoming festival, locals tend to smirk. They conjure up images of some of the more eccentric members of the Kerrville Folk Festival visitors and assume (quite wrongly) that Quiet Valley

Ranch becomes the hub of the hippie universe for three weeks. Local folks tend to judge the festival without having visited the festival.

Those who have actually gone to the Kerrville Folk Festival have learned something that might surprise those who haven't been. While there are plenty of 'colorful' attendees at the Kerrville Folk Festival, there are more than a few other folk there, too. Doctors, teachers, preachers, booksellers, cooks, executives, working folk and students all go to the Kerrville Folk Festival. The crowds I've seen don't look that much different than crowds you'd see in Antler Stadium for a Friday night football game.

While most go for the music, I think many go for the warm sense of community the festival warmly creates. The big stage generates most of the attention, of course, but most of the stories and memories I've heard center around guitars and campfires, the shared hardships of camping during our brief rainy season, and good meals eaten on rustic boards among friends and conversation.

I hope you'll get to go to the folk festival during its long run the next few weeks and see it for yourself; remember, it's usually a good idea to take lawn chairs and a light jacket. While the people-watching is always fun, it's the music that makes the evening.

Joe Herring Jr. is a Kerrville native who was in the audience of the very first Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972.

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