

Oak Ridger, The (TN)

Estimated printed pages: 2

September 11, 2007

Section: Community

Local festival a Shining Example

John Huotari john.huotari@oakridger.com

Oak Ridge officials announced that the city's annual "Secret City Festival" has been named the best in the Southeast United States among events its size.

The Southeast Tourism Society, based in Atlanta, honored the annual festival with what is known as a Shining Example Award, calling it the festival of the year among events with attendance below 100,000.

The Festival of the Year award is given to a festival that generated substantial growth in the last year. The Secret City Festival has grown from a small, city-wide festival into a large, regional event, said Oak Ridge Mayor Pro Tem Jane Miller, who attended the STS awards ceremony in Lake Charles, La.

"We consider this to be a community award," Oak Ridge Mayor Tom Beehan stated at a public announcement held Friday morning.

Held in June, the Secret City Festival includes musical entertainment, a World War II battle re-enactment, childrens' activities, food vendors, informational booths, historic tours, heritage displays, antiques, arts and crafts, and more. This year's festival — the fifth annual — included entertainment from The Oak Ridge Boys and Starship featuring Mickey Thomas.

About 20,000 people attended, said Joye Montgomery, director of the Arts Council of Oak Ridge, a festival presenter.

Officials said the festival is successful because of Oak Ridge's connection to U.S. history.

"It's the heritage," said Jane Gibson, Oak Ridge recreation manager and festival coordinator. "That's what makes it different."

"It reminds us all of the tremendous contribution that was made in the national interest," said George Dials, president of BWXT Y-12, a festival sponsor.

Oak Ridge was built under a veil of secrecy during World War II to enrich uranium for the first atomic bomb used in wartime, among other things.

Anne Ross, Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau sales director, said the award will be used to promote the festival next year.

"It'll be an incredible opportunity to market the festival," she said.

The Southeast Tourism Society had named the Secret City Festival as a Top 20 event earlier this year.

The Shining Example Awards recognize outstanding contributions to the advancement of tourism in 12 Southeastern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

John Huotari can be contacted at (865) 220-5533.

/

Copyright 2007 The Oak Ridger. All Rights Reserved.