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Kansas Sampler Festival Coming To Liberal

The Kansas Sampler Festival is all about celebrating things quirky, true and wonderful about Kansas.

It is about homemade food, woodwork and crafts, and finding out different places to explore and adventure.

“It is an intimate Kansas party,” said Marci Penner, executive director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation, a grassroots organization based in Inman and whose mission is to preserve and sustain rural culture.

This year marks the 24th year the festival has been produced. It has evolved into a weekend celebration of food, music, Kansas history and a mix of rural culture and small-town life.

The festival will be May 4 and 5 in Light Park in Liberal, in the southwest corner of the state – about a four-hour drive from Wichita. This marks the second year the festival has been held in Liberal. Every two years, the festival travels to different locations throughout the state. Next year, it will be hosted in Wamego.

And after that?

Host cities must bid – like in the Olympics – and prove they can bring festival-goers to their town.

“We look at the festival as the start of Explorer season,” Penner said. “It is the unofficial start of the travel season. And at the festival, we are all together celebrating what every town has. Everybody is exited. And it is good to see people after the long winter.”

Sure, it might be a long drive from Wichita; even longer for folks coming from Leavenworth or Atchison.

But isn’t that the point? Penner said.

It is all about the journey – getting out of the house and taking a trip – exploring the state.

“When was the last time you were in Liberal?” she asked. “Most people only know Liberal as the home of the International Pancake Day Race, but there is so much more to it, as well. And it is about seeing things along the way, all the towns and scenery along the way.”

And so, on the first weekend of May, from Fort Scott to Dodge City, Goodland to Atchison, representatives from Kansas towns and tourism destinations will converge on Liberal.

The festival will showcase places to go within Kansas as day trips. Bed-and-breakfasts, historic theaters, cafes and historical points will be featured along with scenic drives.

The festival also highlights Kansas-made products.

“The most common comment we hear from people after they’ve gone through the festival tents is that they had no idea Kansas had this to offer,” Penner said. “We consider this the myth-busting festival.”

# Kansas Sampler Festival

**Where:** Light Park, 111 W. 11th in Liberal

**When:** May 4, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; May 5, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**How much:** $5, or $3 for ages 7 to 12, free for ages 6 and under

**For more information**, go to www.kansassamplerfestival.com.

Wichita Eagle/Beccy Tanner