

MerleFest 2021 Covid19 Safety Information

(as of June 1, 2021)

MerleFest, presented by Window World, is the primary fund raiser for Wilkes Community College which is a member of the North Carolina Community College System. During the Covid19 pandemic we have been, and will continue to follow the state health guidelines as directed by Governor Roy Cooper along with state and local health agencies. The latest directives are showing much improved conditions along with vaccination levels that are increasing every day. Our #1 priority has always been to produce a safe and family friendly event and that certainly is the goal for 2021. In order to achieve safety, we are making a few adjustments for this year's festival that will allow us to present MerleFest in a manner as close to the norm as possible while following state guidelines to keep everyone safe. Below is a summary of safety protocols, enhancements, and changes for 2021. Specific rules on masks and distancing are ever changing so we will continue to communicate to you through our website, email newsletters, and social media as updates occur. As we make these necessary changes and finalize specific rules on all directives in September, we ask for your support and compliance to protect your safety and the safety of all participants. Together, WE CAN do this the right way- THE MERLEFEST WAY!

Festival Safety Protocols:

- **Hand washing/sanitizing**- over 100 hand wash and sanitizing stations are being added throughout festival grounds. Colorful signage will be used to identify these areas and they will also be listed on the official MerleFest site map.
- **Masks**- current state directives require masks to be worn by everyone riding a festival shuttle bus or van and also anyone participating in the Little Pickers Children's area (children 5 and under are exempt). We strongly encourage folks to wear a mask in areas of a high concentration of people. We also strongly encourage anyone that has not been vaccinated to wear a mask.
- **Vaccinations**- The festival strongly encourages all attendees to be vaccinated prior to attending MerleFest. Those who choose not to vaccinate are strongly encouraged to wear a mask at all times for their safety and the safety of others. The Wilkes County Health Department will offer free vaccinations to all volunteers and attendees prior to and during the festival.
- **Distancing**- State mandates have been lifted on all social distancing requirements. We ask all participants to be considerate of your neighbor and to provide plenty of space while enjoying the festival.
- **Health attestation**- All volunteers/staff/food workers will be required to complete a health attestation prior to beginning their shift each day. Anyone who is experiencing Covid symptoms or has been recently exposed to someone with Covid will not be allowed to participate.
- **Safety support**- Representatives from Wake Forest Baptist Health, Wilkes EMS, Wilkesboro Fire Department, and local law enforcement will be on site throughout the festival to handle any health and safety needs.
- **Health Department support**- Representatives from the Wilkes County Health Department will be on site during the festival to monitor health practices in all areas of the festival. In addition, the health department will offer free vaccinations to all volunteers and staff prior to the festival and all festival attendees during the festival.
- **Continuous Cleaning**- WCC Custodial staff and festival cleaning teams will be cleaning, sanitizing high touch areas, and disposing of trash throughout the festival.

Festival Enhancements and Changes for 2021:

- **Festival Hours**- For 2021 we will begin/open the following all at the same time to keep people moving and to reduce congestion in the box office area:
 - **Buses**- start rolling from parking lots at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
 - **Box Office**- will open at 1:30pm on Thursday, and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, and Sun

- **Cooler Check/Gates**- will open at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
- **Shoppes/Crafts**- will open at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
- **Cooler Check**- two additional lanes will be added at the beginning shift each day to Cooler Check to handle express check to move people through quicker
- **New Entrance/Exit**: a new entrance/exit will be added connecting to the greenway behind the apartments. This is for pedestrians entering who already have a wrist band. This will be the primary pedestrian exit from the festival throughout the festival.
- **Heritage Crafts**- We will house all craft vendors in tents that will allow all booths to face outside.
- **Indoor Stages**: We will open windows and doors to enhance circulation of fresh air.
- **Mayes Pit Stage**- We will not offer programming in Mayes Pit for 2021 due to the small size of this auditorium and the inability to increase fresh air flow.
- **Backstage Tours**: We will not offer backstage tours in 2021 to reduce the number of people in the backstage area.
- **MerleFest Museum**: This area will be open with limited capacity constraints.
- **Little Pickers Area**:
 - Masks will be required for all children (children 5 years and under are exempt) and adults entering this area (NC state requirement)
 - The following will be added to this area: jugglers/magician/balloon art will be scheduled to add entertainment to this area
 - To minimize high touch activities, the following will be deleted from this area for 2021: Scrap Exchange, large sandbox, DIY bubbles, and Instrument Petting Zoo.
 - Children's crafts will be modified to allow for distancing and continuous sanitization.
- **MerleFest Mall**: Inventory for the mall will be limited to items from the artists playing at the 2021 festival, Doc Watson/Merle Watson items, and other select offerings. The reduction will allow more room for people to distance and safely shop.
- **MerleFest Apparel**- For the first time, we will offer all MerleFest apparel for sale online August 1-15 to allow fans to purchase and receive their favorite shirts or hats prior to the festival. We will still offer a gift shop on site but this should greatly reduce lines and congestion.
- **School Day at MerleFest**: We will not offer School Day in 2021 to prevent large gatherings of unvaccinated children.
- **Side Stage Seating**: We will not offer side stage seating for Patrons in 2021 as a protection for the artists and to reduce crowding backstage.
- **Large Food Tent**: We will remove all eating tables from this tent. The big food tent will be used solely for selling food/beverages & handling lines of people waiting to purchase.
- **Dining Tent**: We will convert the former R&R Tent to a Dining Tent. Tables & chairs will be placed (distanced) in this area for people to take food and sit down to eat. Sanitation teams will clean tables after each use.
- **Shade Tent**- The R & R tent will now be relabeled as the Shade Tent and will be positioned where the Raffle Tent used to be. This tent offers seating, a lactation room, and a baby changing station in this area.
- **Shuttle Buses**- Per State of NC requirements- all bus riders will be required to wear a mask. Buses will be periodically sanitized. Hand sanitizer will also be provided prior to boarding buses.

We deeply appreciate your patience and support throughout this journey. We have to continually remind ourselves that the issues we are dealing with are short term. If you have specific questions, feel free to contact the MerleFest box office (800) 343-7857 or email us at merlefest@wilkescc.edu. We hope to see you at MerleFest 2021 in September.