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**International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough  
Revives an Age-Old Tradition Worldwide**

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn.— Worldwide, the International Storytelling Center (ISC) is the only center of its kind, devoted solely to the art of storytelling. Located in Jonesborough, Tenn., the International Storytelling Center was designed to further infuse storytelling into the mainstream of society, and it's accomplishing its goal through numerous special events, a medical program and educational exhibits and information.

“Our mission is to inspire people around the world, both children and adults to celebrate their storytelling heritage, and to use the power of story to achieve their personal and community goals,” said Jimmy Neil Smith, founder and president of ISC.

The venue is set on a three-acre park and includes a 200-year old country inn and 14,000-square-foot education building, as well as a welcome and information center, gift shop of storytelling memorabilia and storytelling exhibits. In June through October, ISC visitors also have the opportunity to experience daily live storytelling. The ISC complex is open to the public Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

“The work of the ISC has not only sparked interest around the world, contributing to tremendous growth and revival surrounding the art of storytelling, but it also works to preserve a

piece of the past and the heritage of our region for many generations to come,” said Brenda Whitson, executive director of the Johnson City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The ISC works to enrich the human experience through the art of storytelling, and has numerous programs that support and promote the art.

Each year, on the first full weekend in October, the ISC produces the world’s most prestigious storytelling festival, the National Storytelling Festival, created from the inspirations of Jimmy Neil Smith in 1973, and now hosting more than 10,000 visitors that make the journey annually.

In 1973, Smith, a high school journalism teacher, turned his concept of a local storytelling festival into reality, hosting a crowd of less than 60 people. This was the first event of its type worldwide. Two years after the festival’s inception, the National Storytelling Association (NSA), now known as the ISC, was formed, to promote the power of storytelling and its ability to enrich the human experience.

Entering its 35<sup>th</sup> year, the three-day festival takes place in downtown Jonesborough, with storytellers featured in different circus-like tents, operating under scheduled programming. The audience is likely to hear stories from as nearby as the deep South, or as far away as the British Isles, Africa or Japan, with some tales flavored by ballads or blues. Past events have included *Wickety Whack, Brer Rabbit is Back*, by Diane Ferlatte, told from American slaves; *Mucho Macho Muchacho* by Angel Vigil, featuring three generations of family men; *W’en Dey ‘Listed by Mitch Capel*, historical stories of the journey of the African American soldier during the Civil War; and *Roy, the Reverend & the Devil’s Music* by Roy Book Binder, stories of traveling with a blind street musician.

Special events are also included in the festival program. Festival participants can visit the Storytelling Studio to hear personal interviews with well-known storytellers or the Exchange Place, featuring new and specially invited storytellers. Youthful Voices exhibits young performers from around the nation, while the Swappin’ Ground opens the stage for anyone to share their story and talent. For an additional ticket, adults can attend the Midnight Cabaret, a late-night collection of adult entertainment, or Ghost Stories, a compilation of frightening tales. Ghost Stories is not recommended for children under the age of six.

A second program the ISC hosts to promote the art is the Teller-in-Residence program, running from June to October, and featuring 22 well-known storytellers (one per week) from across the nation or abroad.

“The Teller-in-Residence line-up encompasses a wealth of cultures, geography and styles, spread throughout a five-month period,” said Susan O’Connor, ISC’s director of programs. “It’s designed to offer our regional audience and our visitors an ongoing opportunity to see live storytelling in Jonesborough.”

The Stories for the Soul program, a partnership between ISC and the Mountain States Foundation, focuses on the positive effects storytelling can have on a healthcare patient and uses videos of well-known storytellers to provide a healing environment specifically designed for the healthcare experience. Currently, this method is being used in the Johnson City Medical Center, and if expanded, will be available as a storytelling channel to healthcare facilities worldwide.

“Stories for the Soul was created to provide a more nurturing environment for health and healing, which starts in the patient’s hospital room. The idea of developing a television program for this use was presented to us and we co-created the initial pilot,” said Smith. “Based on research, patients who tell their life experience stories as a part of their healing process have lower anxieties, better coping skills and improved outcomes.”

“Patients watching Stories for the Soul are, at least for a moment, experiencing a diversion from their health challenges and are encouraged to think about their own stories, which creates a more nurturing environment for healing.”

ISC also affiliates with the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress to develop a national and international program to collect, preserve and disseminate information and materials about the traditions, practice and application of storytelling.

The International Storytelling Center is dedicated to improving the lives of people around the world through the power of storytelling by inspiring and empowering people around the world to capture and tell their stories, listen to the stories of others and use storytelling to produce positive change. For more information, please visit [www.storytellingcenter.com](http://www.storytellingcenter.com), or call (800) 952-8392.

Johnson City is located in Northeast Tennessee and is the fourth largest metropolitan city in the state. Set in a region known as America's First Frontier, Johnson City is “Where the Pioneer Spirit Began”—a historically significant and culturally rich community surrounded by an abundance of unspoiled natural beauty. Johnson City has a history, which dates back more than 200 years, and its culture embraces individual creativity and encourages innovation through expression. The area is world-renowned for its modern and traditional Appalachian and bluegrass music, art and cuisine, and outdoor recreation for the whole family throughout all four seasons. For more information on Johnson City, please visit [www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com](http://www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com) or call (423) 461-8000 or (800) 852-3392.

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