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**World Renowned Storytelling Festival Brings Thousands
Together to Celebrate Ancient Tradition**

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn.—While some may think of storytelling as an outdated way to entertain children, in reality, storytelling is a tradition that has been around since the beginning of time, and one that is essential to the preservation of our culture.

“Storytelling has been one of the most important past times in our nation’s history. From stories, passed down over generations, people have learned to hope and dream, as well as learning the values, lessons and traditions to preserve our ancestors’ culture,” said Brenda Whitson, executive director of the Johnson City Convention and Visitor’s Bureau.

The National Storytelling Festival, held annually in Jonesborough, Tenn., encourages the power of this tradition, its influence on the soul, as well as providing festival attendees with entertainment and escape through the words and tales of the featured storytellers.

“This world-renowned festival encompasses many of the best storytellers in the nation. No matter what age or occupation, this festival inspires everyone to celebrate the storytelling tradition,” said Whitson.

It began in 1973 when a young man named Jimmy Neil Smith, a high school journalism teacher from Mississippi, was inspired by one of the great storytellers of all time, Jerry Clower. Through this experience, the young man brought the idea of a storytelling festival to East Tennessee. This event was the first of its kind in the world.

After only two years, the festival inspired the formation of the National Storytelling Association, which is now known as the International Storytelling Center (ISC). The ISC promotes and organizes the National Storytelling Festival annually.

“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 Smith, founder and president of ISC.

Each year, on the first full weekend in October, the ISC produces the world’s most prestigious storytelling festival, the National Storytelling Festival. While the event began with 60 people, today it hosts more than 10,000 visitors at the three-day outdoor festival in Jonesborough, just 15 minutes southwest of Johnson City. With unique tellers in attendance, presenting their traditions in circus-like tents, listeners should expect to hear stories from the Deep South, the British Isles, Africa or even Japan. And some stories are even accompanied by ballads or the blues.

Past festivals have featured tales like *W’en Dey Listed* by Mitch Capel, historical stories of the journey of the African American soldier during the Civil War; *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; and *Roy, the Reverend & the Devil’s Music* by Roy Book Binder, stories of traveling with a blind street musician.

Throughout the festival, various storytellers host smaller special events like the Storytelling Studio, where visitors can hear personal interviews with featured storytellers at the festival. The Exchange Place features invited newcomers to the National Storytelling Festival stage as they share their well-regarded stories. The Swappin’ Ground opens the stage for any amateur storyteller to practice, or just share an interesting story, and young tellers from around the nation demonstrate their talents at Youthful Voices.

Two of the most popular events at the festival are the Midnight Cabaret and Ghost Stories. Midnight Cabaret, beginning after 10:30 p.m., is designed for an adult audience, while the Ghost Story concerts, suggested for children ages six and up, features creepy and spine tingling stories.

Visitors can discover diverse storytelling at the special concert, the Exchange Place, featuring tellers, highly revered in the storytelling community, and normally showcasing their first time on the stage of the National Storytelling Festival.

“The National Storytelling Festival seeks to entertain all ages and it does with an amazing variety of events scheduled throughout the festival. After one story, visitors will be hooked by the vivid imagery and amusing humor that many tellers provide,” said Whitson.

For more information, please visit 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 or call (423) 461-8000 or (800) 852-3392.

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