

MerleFest, presented by Lowe's, has come to a close for another year. Early estimates show that, from its start on Thursday, April 24, to its close on Sunday, April 27, aggregate participation over the festival's four days exceeded 76,000 participants, staying comparable with last year's numbers. MerleFest, held on the campus of Wilkes Community College, is the primary fundraiser for the WCC Endowment Corporation, funding scholarships, capital projects and other educational needs.

"With over 130 artists playing on 13 stages, representing everything from bluegrass and blues, to gospel, country and Americana, we feel that we succeeded again in giving our festival guests a great value for their entertainment dollars," said Ted Hagaman, director of the festival. "We deeply appreciate the support of the great citizens of Wilkes County, everyone who works here at the college, and of course our volunteers and fans, for making this all possible."

"MerleFest continues to celebrate the life and music of our dear friends Doc and Merle Watson because the legacy of their music will always be the artistic center of the festival," added Hagaman. "It's our sincere desire that, for years to come, musicians and fans alike will think of MerleFest as a way to come together as a family to pay tribute to these very special musicians."

Performers who helped make MerleFest 2014 a rousing success include Alan Jackson, Merle Haggard, Old Crow Medicine Show, Carolina Chocolate Drops, Dailey & Vincent with Jimmy Fortune, Dr. Ralph Stanley, Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder, Steep Canyon Rangers, Sam Bush Band, Peter Rowan Band, Jerry Douglas, Junior Sisk and Ramblers Choice, Claire Lynch Band, Keller Williams and the Travelin' McCourys, Tim O'Brien and Darrell Scott, Jim Lauderdale, Balsam Range, Lonesome River Band, Town Mountain, Alison Brown Quartet, Scythian, The Kruger Brothers, The Duhks, Todd Snider, The Steel Wheels, Della Mae, Holly Williams, Nora Jane Struthers and the Party Line, Donna the Buffalo and many more. Every year, music fans at the festival experience what has become known as "MerleFest Moments" – special groupings of performances, jam sessions and events that get the whole festival talking and become legendary in the festival's rich history.

One of those sets this year was Friday night's highly anticipated set from Old Crow Medicine Show on the Watson Stage. The popular band – the newest member of the Grand Ole Opry – often credit both Doc Watson and MerleFest with helping launch their career. They have even written a song about Doc and Merle Watson for their upcoming album and performed it at MerleFest 2014, dedicating it to Doc.

Other "MerleFest Moments" this year included the Thursday night's set from the Carolina Chocolate Drops, Friday's phenomenal "BanjoRama" event, featuring some of the world's most celebrated banjo players together on one stage, and the Acoustic Kids Showcases, where festival attendees got an early taste of the next generation of roots music superstars. Since MerleFest has often served as a launching pad for rising talent, fans spread the word about new "buzz bands" like Mandolin Orange, Jon Stickley Trio, Josh Farrow, I Draw Slow, Kim Robins and 40 Years Late, Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen, Nu-Blu and the South Carolina Broadcasters.

The Hillside Album Hour, which draws thousands of fans each year to the hillside on Saturday afternoon, was hosted by The Waybacks with special guests Jim Lauderdale, Celia Woodsmith of Della Mae, Jens Kruger and many others. The performers featured Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's landmark 1970 album "Déjà Vu." Fans filled the hillside to find out what album would be

Marvelous Music, Weather at Merlefest 2014

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featured, which is always a closely held secret until the show begins.

The Midnight Jam on Saturday, presented in partnership with The Bluegrass Situation and hosted once again by Scythian, featured special guests Keller Williams, Nora Jane Struthers and The Party Line, Peter Rowan, Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen, Steep Canyon Rangers, Della Mae, the Moore Brothers, The Steel Wheels, Donna the Buffalo, I Draw Slow, The Waybacks, Pete and Joan Wernick, The Deadly Gentlemen, Jim Lauderdale, South Carolina Broadcasters, Mandolin Orange, Mark Newton and Steve Thomas, Town Mountain, and Lynda and Pattie.

In addition to promoting "traditional plus" music, a term coined by Doc Watson to describe the wide variety of musical genres and styles celebrated at MerleFest, the festival also featured heritage crafts demonstrations, instrument picking lessons and jam sessions, dancing, instrument contests, music education workshops and the Chris Austin Songwriting Contest. The Shoppes at MerleFest, located in the center of the festival grounds, was a popular area filled with heritage crafts, merchandise vendors, the official MerleFest Gift Shop, concessions and valuable services like an information tent, lost and found, overnight storage and more. There was also an R&R tent for festival-goers who needed to take a break and escape the weather.

A significant part of MerleFest's mission is to give back to the community. In that spirit, the outreach program took place on Thursday, with more than 40 of the artists at MerleFest 2014 giving performances for nearly 10,000 children at local schools. In addition, on Friday morning more than 3,000 school children from Wilkes and surrounding counties attended the festival. MerleFest 2014 was presented by Lowe's. MerleFest is grateful to 100+ sponsors and advertisers for their support in making the event possible.

MerleFest, considered one of the premier music festivals in the country, is an annual homecoming of musicians and music fans held on the campus of Wilkes Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. MerleFest was founded in 1988 in memory of the late Eddy Merle Watson, son of the late American music legend Doc Watson. MerleFest is a celebration of "traditional plus" music, a unique mix of music based on the traditional, roots-oriented sounds of the Appalachian region, including bluegrass and old-time music, and expanded to include Americana, country, blues, rock and many other styles. The festival hosts over 130 artists, performing on 13 stages during the course of the four-day event. The annual event has become the primary fundraiser for the WCC Endowment Corporation, funding scholarships, capital projects and other educational needs.