



Washington Bluegrass Association

www.washingtonbluegrassassociation.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TOLEDO BLUEGRASS FEST CANCELLED AMID VIRUS UNCERTAINTY

TOLEDO – Uncertainty regarding the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has led the Washington Bluegrass Association to cancel this year's Mount St. Helen's Bluegrass Festival. The event had been scheduled for August 7-9 at Kemp Olson Memorial Park in Toledo with five bands slated to take the stage at the outdoor venue, a temporary location during construction to replace Toledo High School (where the festival has been held since its 1985 inception).

Instead, the WBA's Board of Directors voted unanimously late last week to cancel their annual showcase this year. "It wasn't an easy decision because so many visitors from out of state, including the bands themselves, circle this one on their calendar," said Board member Bruce Baskin. "The fact that we've always focused on traditional bluegrass music while keeping things affordable and approachable level for both fans and musicians appeals to a lot of people. They know what kind of music they'll hear and that it'll be in a family-friendly setting."

However, like the Southwest Washington Fair and other local summer events that are being called off this year, unknown factors regarding the Coronavirus outbreak made calling off the Mount St. Helen's festival an almost foregone conclusion when the WBA Board met. "Nobody knows in May what conditions are going to be like in August," explains Baskin, "so we're more or less forced to do this. For one thing, even though the virus itself appears to be tapering off, it mostly affects a lot of older people who make up a large part of our concert audience so we need to consider their safety."

"Another consideration was that there hasn't been a clear sense from the Governor's office as to when events like this festival will be allowed to reopen or at what level," Baskin continued. "Logistically, that's tough. We had contracts with bands from Kentucky, California, Idaho and Oregon who needed to confirm their schedules. Then there are vendors, food servers, sound and lighting people and a lot of others affected. You can't undo a three-day event instantly by snapping your fingers."

After cancelling two concerts and a festival, the WBA turns its focus to their 2020-21 season at the Veterans Memorial Museum in Chehalis. "It's been a disappointing year for us for sure," Baskin says, "but it's been tough on everyone. People have lost or been laid off from their jobs, they're behind on their rent or mortgage, they still have families to feed, nobody knows when they can start going back to their lives or even what they'll be going back to."

"We know we'll be back with live bluegrass concerts eventually, so we're just trying to keep this all in perspective."