**P R E S S R E L E A S E**

**(Condensed)**

**Oka Kapassa – Return to Cold Water Native American Festival**

***September 8, 2018 - (Pre-Festival Events on September 6-7)***

***Tuscumbia, Alabama***

***For Immediate Release***

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**Oka Kapassa Native American Festival Returns to Tuscumbia on September 8**

**Additional Events September 6-7**

**Tuscumbia, Alabama:** On Saturday, September 8, Spring Park (located at the south end of Main Street) in Tuscumbia, Alabama, will come alive with the sights and sounds of Native Americans. The Oka Kapassa- Return to Cold Water Native American Festival will bring approximately 150 artists and demonstrators, representing more than a dozen tribes, to dance, perform music, display their artwork and demonstrate Native American life skills. All demonstrators are required to hold Federally-recognized documentation, assuring that the entire event is authentic. The festival is free, and the public is invited to experience the inspirational culture of the first Americans. Spring Park opens at 9:00 a.m. The Grand Entry and Veteran’s Salute is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. in the arena. Festival organizers suggest that you bring a lawn chair and plan to enjoy the events which will last throughout the day. A trolley will run from downtown, providing easy access for parking. In case of inclement weather, the Saturday festival will move to the Tuscumbia Depot Roundhouse.

History tells us that when Native Americans were being assembled for removal to the West, they were camped near Big Spring, now Spring Park. The Indians called the place “Oka Kapassa” meaning Cold Water. When the townspeople observed the deplorable condition of the suffering Indians, they came to the encampment bringing food, clothing and blankets. This is the only known documentation of such compassion. A newspaper of the day published the words of Creek Chief Chilly McIntosh--“As long as our nation remains upon the earth, we will recollect Tuscumbia.” According to Terry McGee, festival chairperson, this is what the Oka Kapassa Festival is based upon and why the Nations travel each year to “The Homeland.”

The ensemble Injunuity (Chickasaw and Choctaw) will head the musical line-up, presenting a unique combination of traditional and contemporary Native American music. Stomp Dance and the Pow Wow style will be demonstrated by dancers in full regalia. According to Anita Flanagan, festival co-chair, “Stomp Dance is the more traditional and ceremonial dance form, while you can expect Pow Wow dance to have more bling and high energy.”

New to the 2018 performance line-up is Native flute player Tommy Wildcat, a scholar in Cherokee Cultural and American Indian Studies. Wildcat has been named a Cherokee National Treasure. Story-teller Freeman Owle will return to share legends and to provide a first-person portrayal of Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee form of writing. Also returning is Micah Swimmer (Cherokee) who, with his family, will present traditional stories, dances and living history interpretation. Lyndon Alec, who has amazed festival-goers in the past with his demonstrations of the highly-skilled Hoop Dance, will be joined this year by his grandsons, who are learning the tradition.

Artisans selected for their quality work will offer beautifully-crafted jewelry, basketry, pottery and more, with items available for purchase. Demonstrations will include blow gun, tomahawk, archery, native language booths and encampments. Foods, including Indian fry bread, Indian tacos and more will be available. Throughout the festival will be heard the “heartbeat” of the Drum.

On Friday, September 7, an educational day will be offered to school groups in the park. Limited space is available for 4th and 5th grade students, who will spend the morning rotating around stations of discovery provided by the Oka Kapassa demonstrators. Teachers must pre-register. Lezlie Martin, who heads the school day program, believes that this is the most significant aspect of the festival. A long-running theme of Oka Kapassa is, “If the stories fall silent, who will teach the children?”

In addition to activities in Spring Park, several free pre-festival outreach events are planned across the Shoals for Thursday, September 6th. The Children’s Museum of the Shoals, Florence, will present story-teller Amy Bluemel and hoop dancer Lyndon Alec, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. The Sheffield Public Library will offer music by Injunity, with Micah Swimmer performing traditional dance and songs, and a presentation on the history of Tuscumbia Landing by the Trail of Tears Association, 5:30-7:30 p.m. The Muscle Shoals Library will host the Chickasaw Dance Troupe from Oklahoma and storyteller Freeman Owle, 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Oka Kapassa- Return to Cold Water, and the additional events, are made possible through assistance from Alabama State Council on the Arts, the City of Tuscumbia, the Chickasaw Nation, Colbert County Community Development Commission, Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area, Northwest Alabama Resource Conservation and Development (RC & D), Onaway Trust, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, TVA Community Credit Union, Tennessee Valley Authority, the City of Sheffield, Sheffield Public Library, Trail of Tears Association and the Muscle Shoals Public Library and the Children’s Museum of the Shoals. Other local businesses and community sponsors are listed on the festival website.

The Oka Kapassa Festival, now in its 18th year, is an official Alabama 200 Bicentennial event. It has been named to the Southeast Tourism Society Top Twenty list and was declared a National Park Service Centennial event.

For a full schedule of events or for more information, including how to book a school group, visit [www.okakapassa.org](http://www.okakapassa.org), the Oka Kapassa Facebook page, call 256-757-4438 or Colbert County Tourism 256-383-0783.

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