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Community Organizers Plan Wheeling's Juneteenth Celebration

WHEELING, W.Va. – June 6, 2023 – Wheeling's Juneteenth Celebration will be held on Monday, June 19, to commemorate the end of slavery in America. The event will begin at 6 p.m. with a short ceremony at the north end of The Plaza on Market. The location is of significance as the space was once a slave auction block. After the ceremony, music, entertainment, and food trucks will follow at the south end of the Plaza. The event is free and open to the public.

The Wheeling Juneteenth Committee, which is made up of representatives from Wheeling Heritage, Wheeling YWCA, City of Wheeling, Wheeling NAACP, Oglebay Institute, and the Ohio Valley Underground Railroad Museum and local leaders in the Black community, will host this year's event.

Juneteenth celebrations date back to June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers landed at Galveston, Texas, with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. This was more than two years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which had become official on January 1, 1863. Juneteenth was officially recognized as a US federal holiday on June 17, 2021.

The Wheeling Area Juneteenth Committee invites area high school-aged poets to express their thoughts and emotions about this important day in American history. This contest celebrates the end of slavery in the United States and the struggle for freedom and equality. Students are encouraged to use their creativity and imagination to explore the themes of liberation, justice, and hope. The poems can be written in any style and format, and the winners will be selected based on originality, clarity, and emotional impact with submissions due by Friday, June 9.

Speakers for the event's opening ceremonies include Unique Robinson-Murphy, Communities in Schools Site Coordinator for Wheeling Park High School; Diana Bell of the Wheeling Griot Society; Rev. Twila Davis of the Macedonia Baptist Church; and Glenn Elliott, mayor of the City of Wheeling.

After the ceremony, music, entertainment, and food trucks will follow at the south end of the plaza featuring performances by Voices of Praise and Soul Pantry. A vendor market will be set up at the Market Plaza as well. Applications for food, artwork, merchandise, and more will be reviewed on a rolling basis until June 2, with preference given to black owned businesses and vendors. Those interested can apply at wheelingjuneteenth.com. SouthPaw Eats and So Nuts 4 Donuts will be available for attendees.



“Hopefully the novelty of Juneteenth is beginning to wear off and individuals can begin to embrace the holiday as one where we can learn from one another,” said Ron Scott, cultural diversity and community outreach director at the YWCA Wheeling, and chair of the Juneteenth Committee. “Overall, we want to see Juneteenth help foster a closer-knit community.”

“We are so proud to see Wheeling's Juneteenth celebration grow year after year. Four years ago, we were part of the inaugural celebration, and it lasted about two hours and rained the entire time,” said Betsy Sweeny, Director of Heritage Programs at Wheeling Heritage. “Every single person stayed. It was an impactful moment that demonstrated how important this event is in the community. This year, four years later, we have four days of events, from education to entertainment, and expect our largest crowd yet.”

In the days leading up to June 19, notes about other events celebrating Juneteenth include Ohio Valley Underground Railroad Museum Celebration and Fundraiser, Belmont County NAACP Steak Fry Fundraiser, Men of Change Empowerment Fair, and a free movie screening at Towngate Theatre. More information can be found online at wheelingjuneteenth.com.

All Wheeling Juneteenth events are free and open to the public. For more information or to get involved, visit wheelingjuneteenth.com or contact Ron Scott at cdcodirector@ywcawheeling.org.

About YWCA Wheeling

YWCA Wheeling is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, stand up for social justice, help families and strengthen our community. The organization offers programming for family violence prevention, cultural diversity and community outreach, residence and emergency homeless sheltering and non-treatment recovery. YWCA Wheeling is an active member agency of the United Way of the Upper Ohio Valley.

About Wheeling Heritage:

[Wheeling Heritage](http://wheelingheritage.com) is a catalyst for the revitalization of Wheeling. Through historic preservation, community development, and the arts, we help to tell Wheeling's story and shape its future. We seek to improve the quality of life in Wheeling by preserving and investing in our city, collaborating with others, and engaging the citizens of Wheeling in our work.