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A Tale to Tell at Frisco Square

By Cynthia Howe



IN TIMES PAST, minstrels, bards and actors wandered throughout civilization sharing their colorful tales and songs, such as Robin Hood, Beowulf and King Arthur. Since the beginning of time, mankind has been able to communicate its culture and belief system through the art of storytelling. Tales such as Robin Hood were shared to encourage chivalry, honor and social justice.

The National Storytelling Network defines “storytelling” as “the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener’s imagination.” For the past two years many “Frisconians” have enjoyed this time-honored art form at the Frisco Storytelling Festival.

This year marks the Third Annual Frisco Storytelling Festival to be held October 20th and 21st at Frisco Square, in front of the beautiful new City Hall and Library. The first year of the Festival was marked with great success as it was voted Best First Storytelling Festival – Ever! by the National Storytellers Network. The festival is known among nationally recognized storytellers as a highly professional event. But who would have known when it was first presented that it would become such an exquisite success.

When the idea of a Storytelling Festival was first shared three years ago,

Bob Chambers’ first reaction was “what’s that?” Mr. Chambers serves as treasurer for the Frisco Public Library Foundation and also sits on the board of trustees. “Storytelling Festivals are somewhat unknown as a form of entertainment, and I knew nothing about them. However, you’ll find that once you experience it, you want to go back every chance you get.”

The stories shared here come from the heart and soul of the performer, and the experience is breathtaking.

The Festival has become a destination event with many coming from out of state to experience this ancient form of oral narration. You won’t find any books in the hands of the performers for this is not your childhood “storytime” experience. The stories shared here come from the heart and soul of the performer, and the experience is breathtaking.

THE PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLERS

The six award-winning storytellers that await festival visitors will be sharing their tales under huge tent canopies sprawling across the Square. They will hold you spellbound as they unweave fables, both hilarious and poignant, as well as ballads and some of the best “tall-tales” ever told. In fact, one folklorist may be referred to as the “King of Tall Tales.”

Bill Lepp is not only known for his tall, (albeit not factual - but almost true) stories, he has also won the top prize in the West Virginia Liars Contest five times. “The secret to a good story is a grain of truth that stirs up an emotional reaction in the audience. To be good at storytelling you have to identify what the audience responds to and present the story in



2005 performers Charlie Chin (above); Susan Keys (below)
photos provided by Frisco Public Library



Audience at the 2005 Storytelling Festival

photo provided by Frisco Public Library

such a way that maximizes the audience's response, the audience's connection," Mr. Leap said. But not all storytellers are natural born liars.

Dr. Rex Ellis is a professional storyteller as well as teacher, historian and the current vice president of the Historic Area at Colonial Williamsburg, where, no doubt, many visitors claim him as their "favorite." Dr. Ellis stated, "I have seen bridges built with storytelling that invites listeners and tellers to unite in ways that are more potent than a town meeting and more healing than a therapy session. It's pretty hard to hate someone whose story you know."

As Carmen Deedy's performs in concert, (although not musical, the public performance of oral literature, with its rhythm and beats, is appropriately termed "concert") she delights and amuses with her energetic and appealing style. How does one grow up very Cuban in very southern Decatur, Georgia? Can the retelling be anything less than comical and just as endearing?

Willy Clafin, a professional raconteur that captivates audiences (along with his side-kick Maynard Moose), has been a musician, scholar, traveler and teacher, but his best known role to date has been charming and delighting audiences, both

young and old, with his hilarious mix of monologue and musical storytelling. His expertise, however, appears to be in his ability to fracture a fairytale like seldom others can.

Oral narration differs from multi-media storytelling in that it is experienced first hand and relies on the individual's creativity and imagination.

Take a vibrantly odd bird, with feathers that tease and tickle; add a whopper-full of personality and a shaker full of southern charm, and you'll end up with an endearing, talented storyteller named Andy Offutt Irwin. He's quite a colorful concoction! From the deep, deeeapp south city of Covington, Georgia, Andy is known for his unique gift for body part percussions, wicked mouth intonations and the kind of whistling that would leave Gomer Pyle impressed.

Within the rhythm and spirit of the

Native-American people lies a culture expressed historically through the art of folklore. Dovie Thomason, a Kiowa Apache and Lakota native, has shared over the past 20 years, the stories of her culture. She has been featured in a number of documentaries and has been coined a natural storyteller for her intertwining of traditional stories, untold histories and memories.

LOCAL PARTICIPANTS AND ACTIVITIES

Along with a fabulous array of professional orators, each year the Festival Committee chooses ten aspiring storytellers from local schools to participate on Saturday afternoon. Student speakers this year include D. D. Shaw, Erin Nelson, Katie Gould, Kara Gould, Meena Subramanian, Keith Kibby, Megan Hope, Raquel Staples, Jennifer Pryor and K.J. Tinsley.

The student storytellers are not the only participants from the local school district. On Friday afternoon, the entire session is devoted to Frisco elementary school students in grades 4th and 6th.

While the storytellers are contained in two large, canopied tents, the third tent is committed to meandering musicians, unique festival gifts such as storytellers CDs, tapes, books and videos, and arts

and craft demonstrations. Artisans will be sharing such crafts as paper making, soap making, quilting and painting. While much is going on under the third tent, on the second floor of the Library kids of all ages will enjoy puppet shows performed by S&D Puppetry. Check for the time schedule and go a bit early to get the best part of the rug.

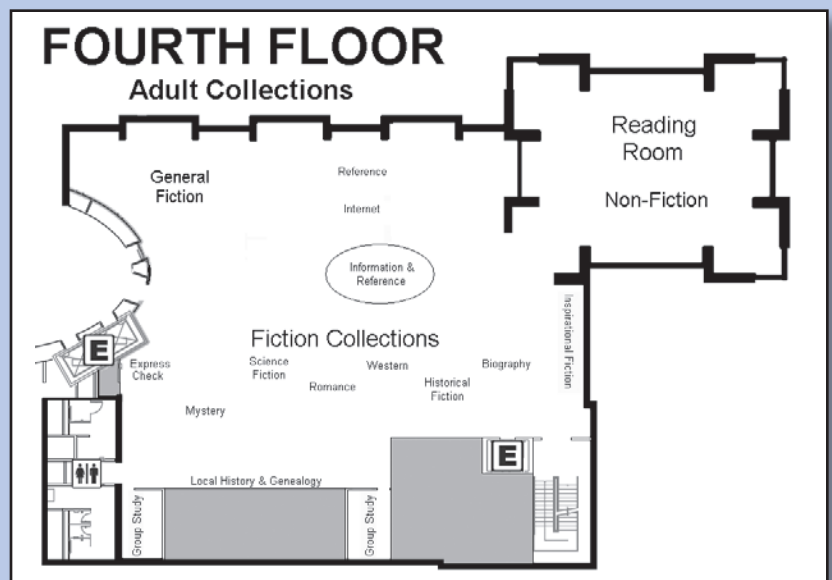
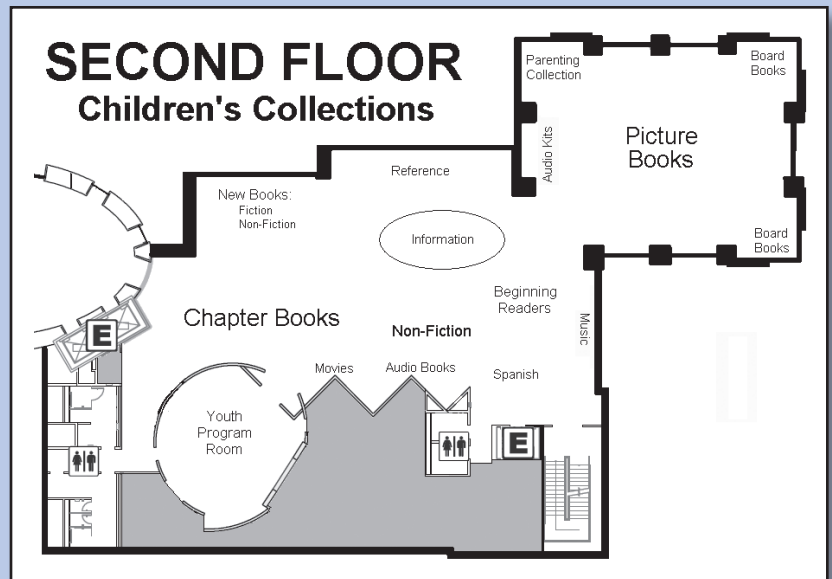
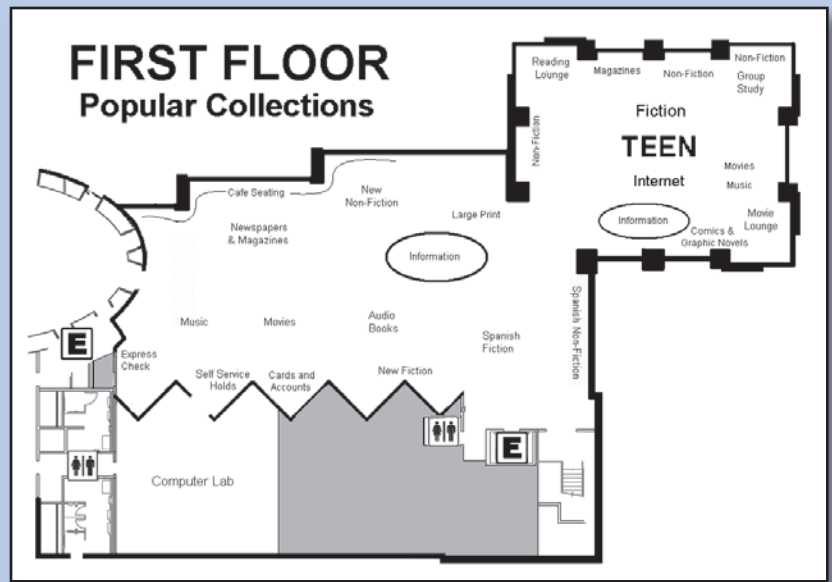
While there is something for everyone, not everyone should come to every event. For example, on Saturday night the performance entitled “Laughing Night,” sponsored by Wise Orthodontics, is geared toward a more mature audience. Dr. Wise has thoroughly enjoyed the festivals in the past, and feels privileged to sponsor the “Laughing Night” portion of the festival. “At first I felt a storytelling festival may be a risk, I’d never been to one before. But it is such a quality event, first class all the way. Every year I tell everyone how fun it is to be right there as the storytellers work their magic,” explained Dr. Wise.

Oral narration differs from multi-media storytelling in that it is experienced first hand and relies on the individual’s sense of creativity and imagination. For example, a described mythological creature from an American-Indian folk story will be different for each audience member, while a visual representation will be mentally distinct. Oral literature relies on the recipient’s imagination and makes the impression more personal, thus making a stronger impact.

It’s exciting to experience the growth occurring around the Festival. The Frisco audience is learning what professional storytelling is, and are growing as listeners, just as the Festival itself has grown. In its first year over 5,000 people were in attendance; while last year attendance grew to over 7,000. The goal is to eventually exceed 25,000 to 30,000 a year as the Festival continues.

The Frisco Public Library Foundation produces the Frisco Storytelling Festival. Generous sponsors assist with the cost of the Festival, while ticket sales go directly to funding the Library Foundation for the benefit of library services in the community. For more information, including schedules, performers, and ticket information go to www.friscostorytellingfestival.org.

Cynthia Howe is a freelance writer living in Little Elm.



Frisco Public Library Map provided by Frisco Public Library