**WASHINGTON ON THE BRAZOS HISTORICAL FOUNDATION**

2023 HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WOB RENOVATION

Senator Lois Kolkhorst procured $31 million in funding from the legislature and the WOBHF has taken the lead in raising the remaining $10 million necessary to bring the project to completion. A capital campaign consulting team, Dini Spheris of Houston, has been hired and is assisting WOB in reaching its goals. John Nau III has pledged $2.5 million in a matching grant. Other board members have contributed and meeting with potential underwriters are underway. So far, $2.8 million has been pledged.

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site is undergoing an epic renovation to create an enhanced visitor experience. This will better interpret the site’s important history through updated gallery exhibits, outdoor interpretive installations, and compelling high tech interactive displays. This project will link all the site’s venues and locations into a single cohesive experience. Construction will be phased over two years, with partial site closure beginning Fall 2023 and continuing into 2025. During this time, **Independence Hall**, **Barrington Plantation State Historic Site**, walking trails, and the picnic area will remain open to the public during regular hours. Tours at Independence Hall will now be offered Wednesday through Saturday at 11am, 1pm and 3pm. Special programs & will focus weekends will continue at Barrington.

**Fanthorp Inn** renovationsbegan in October with Phoenix 1 Restoration. They have completed replacing the roof and have begun on the new windowsills. Recently interpretive and project staff met to discuss ways of preserving and displaying the never-before-seen markings on the front porch siding. The project is running right on schedule and is expected to be completed soon.

**Star of the Republic Museum** closed to visitors in September 2023. The refurbished Museum will provide insight into the early settlers that came in search of a new life and the Republic of Texas era, showcasing the diverse groups that lived in Texas at that time. The Museum will remain closed until 2025.

A new brick double **Entrance Gate** was recentky completed in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation. This prominent entry will begin the journey into a very special place in the history of Texas.

The **Conference Center** will be updated with a focus on corporate retreats and community meeting space.

The **Washington Town Site Experience** will include new buildings that will depict the rise and fall of Washington as a community and its impact on the history of Texas. Archeology Excavations began in October and continue.

EVENTS/PROGRAMS

**Educational Programming**

In 2023 85 schools and 8 homeschool groups brought 4,130 students for educational programs at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site. Another 639 students and parents participated in the sites Homeschool History Day which was hosted in March with a Texas Foodways Theme.  The Brazos Valley Regional History Fair, managed by Washington-on-the-Brazos and hosted in partnership with Blinn College, saw 81 students participate by submitting 48 projects and representing 8 different local school districts.

**Texas Independence Day Celebration**

We had a successful Annual Texas Independence Day Celebration this year with over 6,000 attendees. Visitors were able to visit the Texian Army, enjoy the historic plays and shows, tap their feet to period music and observe some time honored skills of talented craftsmen. Descendants also convened at the conference center to visit with “cousins” explore their roots and raise money for WOB through silent auctions.

**Gone to Texas Camp**

Twenty Five ages 8-12 participated in a 4-day camp at the historic site, visiting each of the venues. The Washington County Historical Society coordinated with the Boys and Girls club to provide transportation and food for the students, which was donated by local establishments.

**The Judge Eddie Harrison Memorial Juneteenth Heritage Celebration**

The Annual Judge Eddie Harrison Memorial Juneteenth Heritage Celebration featured live exhibits, displays, genealogical workshops and music brought about 530 visitors to the historic site.

**Christmas on the Brazos**

Candlelight Christmas continues to attract visitors looking for an old fashioned, less commercial celebration of the season. Almost 300 tickets were sold for two days of celebration.

**Beef on the Brazos**

Beef on the Brazos continues to be a popular fundraiser for WOB, and an excellent way to present the historic site to a new audience. A herd of 20 F1 Braford heifers were raffled off. A raffle ticket only costs $50, and just 2000 were sold. More than 900 people purchased tickets, with the winning ticket going to Mary L Byer of Waller, Texas. Steve Weems of West Columbia won $1,000 and Ricky Carpenter of Hempstead won $500. Tickets sold out about two weeks early, and WOB netted just under $65,000 on the fundraiser. Tickets will go on sale again in April, 2024.

**Pineywoods Cattle Breeding Program**

The Heritage Livestock Program continues to grow with 5 calves (4 heifers and 1 bull) being born in 2023. Two of those were sired by the new bull purchased last year, “Howie” from Howe, OK. Last year funds were donated to purchase pipe fencing material and a squeeze chute. We’ve been using the new pen extensively to work and load them, and are looking for ways to expand it to make the system work more smoothly when catching the cattle.

**Oxen**

We dealt with a sudden and unexpected loss in fall 2022 of one of the newly purchased oxen. The remaining ox, “Beau”, who did not cope well working solo without his partner Mikey, was sold at auction to help fund the purchase of a new team. Polo, one of our older oxen, passed away Oct. 1st, following complications from arthritis. The last of our old oxen, William - now going on 16 years old! - is still with us but we are hoping to retire him to a private individual’s land after the New Year. Though it started rough and had more bumps along the way, 2023 is closing out with the exciting anticipation of another team, Red and Rock, arriving from Stafford, CT!

FUNDING

**HOT Funds**

HOT fund grants totaling $22,292 were secured from Washington County and Navasota to assist in marketing expenses for WOB.

**Rural Grant**

Secured $1,543 for WOB programming through application to the Brazos Valley Arts Council.

**Membership**

Membership to the Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation earned $23,448 in 2022.

**Brazos Valley Gives**

Participated in Brazos Valley Gives which raised $1,485 for WOB.

**Visitation**

Total visitation for Washington on the Brazos for 2022 was 82, 250.

MARKETING

Through social media efforts, we reached over 560,000 people on Facebook, a 23% increase from 2022 and on Instagram we reached 5,000, a 120% increase from 2022. We increased followers to 15,560 on Facebook and to 1,545 on Instagram. We ran 10 ads on Facebook for 4 different events. The ads alone reached 209,589 with 7,918 event responses.

Our website averages about 230 users a day with 90% of users being new to the website. We continue to utilize the website to promote upcoming events, share history of our site and sell tickets for events & fundraisers.

On the PR & Advertising side, we sent out press releases for all major events to local news outlets and those around Texas. Several stories were picked up and received great coverage for TIDC, Juneteenth, Beef on the Brazos and Candlelight Christmas.