



June 1, 2017

Media only: Angelica Aboulhosn (202) 633-0644; aboulhosna@si.edu

Media website: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

Smithsonian Folklife Festival Wins Sustainability Excellence Award

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival has received the Sustainability Excellence Award from the American Alliance of Museums. Announced at the group’s annual conference in St. Louis last month, the award recognizes exceptional sustainability efforts and selected the Festival as the recipient of the 2017 award in “Large Museum Programming” for its innovative practices and industry-setting standards.

In 2007, when former technical director Robert Schneider instituted a recycling initiative at the Festival, the annual event switched to compostable materials, added staff to educate visitors on the value of recycling and set the standard for public events across the Smithsonian and within the wider industry. By 2016, nearly 100 percent of Festival vendor materials were compostable, and more than 100 volunteers helped with the resource recovery effort. Last year, a record 97 percent of waste at the Festival was diverted from landfills.

Later, the Smithsonian’s “banners to bags” project, led by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History staff archeologist Eric Hollinger, began the practice of recycling discarded Festival vinyl banners into tote bags for visitors. The bags serve the dual purpose of reducing the need for single-use plastic bags and raising funds for sustainability projects across the Smithsonian’s museums and research centers.

“The Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s sustainability effort has become an accepted ethos and expected practice,” said James Deutsch, curator at the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. “The effort is setting a new standard for sustainable public events that will serve as a positive model for museums and other venues around the world.”

Additional sustainability initiatives undertaken by the Festival include the use of biodiesel generators and the donation of excess food to food banks. Waste cooking oil is also converted to biofuel. The effort extends to construction materials, which are carefully disassembled and diverted to local nongovernmental organizations for reuse. Visitors are encourage to use free water stations to fill reusable water bottles.

“We are honored to be recognized with the Sustainability Excellence Award,” said Sabrina Lynn Motley, director of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. “Many artists, too, have contributed to our thinking by using cans and plastic and glass bottles to make crafts and highlight their culture’s creative recycling of materials other societies view as waste. Taken as a whole, these efforts not only improve the experience for our visitors but also ensure that our programs continue well into the future.”

About the Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The [Smithsonian Folklife Festival](#), inaugurated in 1967, honors contemporary living cultural traditions and celebrates those who practice and sustain them. Produced annually by the Smithsonian’s [Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#) in partnership with the National Park Service, the Festival has featured participants from all 50 states and more than 100 countries. Follow the Festival on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

###