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Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival Will Not Take Place in 2027 Following Loss of Longtime Home

WINTHROP, WA — The Winthrop Music Association (WMA) announced today that the Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival will not take place in 2027 following the loss of its longtime home at the Blues Ranch.

The property owner recently informed WMA that the property would no longer be available to the Association. The decision was not a reflection of the Association's stewardship of the property or operation of the festival, but rather a personal decision by the property owners that the time was right for their family to move in a different direction. WMA asked for the opportunity to remain for one final year so the festival could celebrate its 40th anniversary at the place it has called home for more than three decades, but those efforts were unsuccessful.

Without access to the property, the Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival as the community has known and loved it cannot take place in 2027.

“This is an incredibly difficult announcement for us to make,” said Rick Northcott, President of the WMA Board of Directors. “We had every intention of celebrating our 40th anniversary at the Blues Ranch in July. After 33 years on this property, we had hoped to celebrate that milestone together and, if our time there truly had to end, have the opportunity to say a proper goodbye.”

The Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival has been held on the property since 1994, first under founder Jim Smith and, since 2005, under the nonprofit Winthrop Music Association.

Over those years, the festival grew from a beloved regional gathering into an award-winning, nationally recognized music festival, earning the Blues Foundation's prestigious Keeping the Blues Alive Award for Best U.S. Festival, along with numerous honors from the Washington Festivals & Events Association and Washington Blues Society.

WMA is grateful to the landowner for making the Blues Ranch available to the festival for so many years. Throughout that time, the Association cared for the property and invested in improvements that helped shape the festival experience. Over the years, this remarkable setting along the Methow River became much more than a festival site — it became a place deeply connected to the identity and history of the event, and a second home to generations of artists, volunteers and festivalgoers. Friendships were formed, traditions were created and countless memories were made along the banks of the Methow River.

The festival has also become an important part of the Methow Valley, bringing thousands of visitors to the area each July and supporting businesses and organizations throughout the region. WMA is grateful for the longstanding support of the Town of Winthrop, Okanogan County and the greater Methow Valley community.

Since becoming a nonprofit in 2005, the Winthrop Music Association has contributed more than \$130,000 back to community and nonprofit organizations as part of its mission to *Build Community Through Music*.

WMA extends its heartfelt thanks to the hundreds of dedicated volunteers, staff and contractors, sponsors, community partners and local businesses whose commitment and support helped make the festival possible year after year. Their contributions have been essential to the festival's success and lasting legacy.

"The festival has always been about much more than music," said Erika Olsen, Festival Director. "It has been about community — the artists, volunteers, businesses, partners and generations of festivalgoers who made this something truly special. While we are deeply saddened that the 40th will not take place at the Blues Ranch, we are extraordinarily proud of what has been built there over all these years and have excitement about what is possible for our future."

While the Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival, as we have produced it, will not take place in 2027, the board is determined to find a new location and keep bringing the joy of this event to the Methow Valley for the next generation.

For now, the WMA Board is exploring ways to appropriately honor and celebrate the festival's 40th anniversary and its remarkable history. Those conversations are just beginning, and no decisions have been made.

"We don't know yet what that might look like," Olsen said. "What we do know is that nearly 40 years of music, friendships and community deserve to be acknowledged. We want to take some time and thoughtfully consider how we might do that."

"Our 39th festival became our last at the Blues Ranch without any of us knowing we were saying goodbye," Northcott said. "That may be the hardest part. But we are enormously proud of what this community created together and incredibly grateful to everyone who has been part of it."

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Winthrop Music Association

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