

The Crooked Road gains a new venue and boosts tourism

By: Megan Henderson

Word Count: 651

The Crooked Road is a historical route through Southwest VA where folk and heritage music were born. The Crooked Road celebrates this heritage and culture with various venues and stops throughout VA, but a new addition to Rocky Mount, VA is providing a new venue for Crooked Road music.

The Harvester Performance Center opened in April 2014 in Rocky Mount, the town that serves as the Eastern Gateway to The Crooked Road. The Harvester supplies the town with all different genres of live music and entertainment, but it is now one of 60 venues affiliated with The Crooked Road.

The Crooked Road is 330 miles long, built of connecting roads that tourists may drive though at their leisure. There are stops and waysides along the roads where tourists may encounter musical venues, festivals, and exhibits. Rocky Mount was included in the stops before, but now The Harvester is among the venues included among the Crooked Road's stops.

"The Crooked Road events in the past have been held in small venues with limited access. The Harvester can not only hold more audiences, we can also bring in local and national acts that might not have played this area in the past. We only see this as a growth experience," Assistant General Manager of The Harvester Performance Center Sheila Silverstein said.

The Harvester is now working to include two Crooked Road shows a month in their schedule. The next show will be on October 18, 2014, and will include three different musical groups; Mountain Park Old-time Band, Trevor and Travis Stuart, and Mac & Jenny Traynham.

All three groups have been playing together for years and Mountain Park Old-time Band performed at the Rhythm & Roots Festival in Bristol, TN, a city included in The Crooked Road's venues as the "Birthplace of Country Music."

The town of Rocky Mount has attempted to use The Crooked Road as a tourist attraction to generate business in the past.

"The tourism potential of The Crooked Road is vast, and Rocky Mount and Franklin County obviously are integral parts of that road. In fact, we could not be situated any better. The market for such a trip is huge for those who live in the Northeast and for those who make the trip, most will start right here," said *The Franklin News-Post* regarding The Crooked Road's national attention in 2011.

The Harvester Performance Center is also becoming a tourist attraction after winning two awards from The Virginia Municipal League earlier this month. The Harvester won best project for a town with the population of fewer than five-thousand people, as well as best project in the state.

"We see more and more people coming to Rocky Mount. We've had them come from as far away as Arizona, Illinois, and Vermont. We have people coming from the U.K. just to see a show," Assistant Town Manager Matthew Hankins said.

The Crooked Road also announced in early October 2014 that a regional music festival is in development, titled "Mountains of Music Homecoming." Officials are hopeful that the festival

will attract between 5,000 and 10,000 people. It will be held from June 12 to 20, 2015, across 19 different counties.

“This is going to be the place for people from all over the country to come to hear the magic of music in the mountains. The concerts are going to occur everywhere from Norton and Lebanon all the way to Rocky Mount in Franklin County,” President of an assisting marketing firm Karen Tessier said.

Plans have not yet been finalized,, and it is unclear if The Harvester will be involved in the Mountains of Music Homecoming festival, but as Rocky Mount is a stop on The Crooked Road, it will likely receive tourists.

“The Harvester is proud to be associated with the Kick Off of the 44th Annual Folk Life Festival and all the Crooked Road Shows,” Silverstein said.

