



Embargo:
November 18, 2009
11 a.m.

Contact:
Becky Booker
Communications Manager
205/562-3220 ext. 35
bbooker@tctpara.org
www.tctpara.org

Source: Becky Booker, Communications Manager, 205/562-3220 ext. 35

**PARA ANNOUNCES GRAND MARSHALS OF
CHRISTMAS PARADE AT PRESS CONFERENCE**

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. -- The Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority announced the Grand Marshals of the 2009 West Alabama Christmas Parade during a press conference held on November 18 in the downtown PARA Building.

The 2009 Grand Marshals are the Volunteers of Kentuck represented by Carrie Fitts and Emily Leigh, both of Tuscaloosa.

A selection committee comprised of representatives from various community organizations chose the two honorees from all the individuals nominated.

When considering significant events that happened during the last year the committee was moved by the tremendous outpouring of support and volunteerism that kept the spirit of Kentuck alive and on its feet during recent challenges. This support has been a source of great inspiration to the Kentuck board of directors and volunteers.

Excerpts from their nomination narratives are as follows:

Fitts and Leigh have been involved behind the scenes for years, but have recently been the faces of Kentuck steering it through a very successful festival. First volunteering and then officially acting as co-interim executive directors they can be credited with literally keeping the doors open.

“They’re both so capable,” said Amy Echols, president of the board of directors. “One has some really good, hard-nosed business sense, and the other is extremely intelligent and passionate about the arts and has a charisma with people that we were lacking in the office,” she said.

Not only did the two take on the management aspect, but the everyday house keeping nature of this job as well. At any given time you could walk into the shop and see a dust cloth, vacuum, toilet brush, plunger, broom or paint brush in hand. Their willingness to roll up their

sleeves and tackle whatever job needed doing has been an inspiration to the volunteers and the community.

Fitts and Leigh have nothing but praise for the work of Amy Echols and the board of directors, studio artists and Steering Committee veterans. Studio artists Steve Davis and Kerry Kennedy pitch in with support all year around. Festival Volunteer leaders are Carolyn Fritz, Renee Agee, Brandon Cooper, Carl Adams, Rashmi Grace, Jeannie Guthrie, Chuck Hall, Allen Clark, Andre Houben, Vicki Hicks Turnage, Brandi Langford, John Parsons, Barbara Patrick, Steve Reinhart, Candy Stephens and Paul Whitehurst. Cobb oven chefs each art night are Joseph Wright and Jeremy Cosby.

During Fitts' and Leigh's tenure, the organizations festival for which it is best known, received two national accolades. *Time Magazine, Inc.* named the organization as "The Authentic American Experience in Alabama" and *American Style* magazine sited it as a "Top 10 Art Fair and Festival."

In addition to their volunteerism with Kentuck both Fitts and Leigh are very active in the community.

Fitts is a native of Houston, Texas and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Eastern Connecticut State University. Her past experience includes television broadcasting and restaurant management and ownership. She served on the Kentuck Board of Directors and also volunteered with Challenge 21. Formerly Carrie Summers, she is married to Lewis Fitts and they have four daughters and one son.

Leigh is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Newcomb College (Tulane). She studied abroad in France and Italy and later taught Italian at the University of Alabama. She also has experience in working as a paralegal, serving on the boards of Tuscaloosa Academy and Kentuck and as a docent at the Westervelt Warner Museum of American Art. Formerly Emily Wolfe, she is married to Jack Leigh and they have one son and one daughter.

The 34th Annual West Alabama Christmas Parade is the largest of its kind in the West Alabama area and is typically held on the first Monday in December. The downtown Tuscaloosa parade route will begin on Greensboro Avenue at 11th Street, travel north to University Blvd. turn east and end at the corner of University Blvd. and 19th Avenue.

Breakfast was generously provided by Merrill Gardens.

Cast members of Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre's "*A Christmas Carol*" provided holiday entertainment.

###

Live, Learn, Play PARA!

www.tcpa.org