

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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OMAHA SUMMER ARTS FESTIVAL PREVAILED IN SEVERE 2008 STORM, RECEIVING NAIA HONOR

Severe weather tested the fate of the 34th Annual Omaha Summer Arts Festival (OSAF) on Friday, June 27, 2008, but Festival staff and the Omaha community passed with flying colors. Due to its quick emergency action and honorable behavior shown before, during and after the storm hit on the first afternoon of the three-day festival, OSAF was the first inductee into the National Association of Independent Artists' (NAIA) Hall of Fame.

Fortunately, when rain driven by 70 mph winds rapidly invaded the OSAF site along the Gene Leahy Mall in downtown Omaha, staff had a pre-established emergency plan that was quickly put into action. They monitored the weather; selectively and effectively disseminated information to the artists, staff and volunteers; shut off all electrical generators; and encouraged everyone to seek shelter in several pre-determined buildings adjacent to the Festival site. Although debris, thousands of dollars of artwork, tents and worried people littered the streets, nobody was injured.

Staff, supported by off-duty Omaha Police officers employed by the Festival to provide security, cleared a path for emergency vehicles as they assessed damage. An all artist/vendor meeting was held to disseminate information and make a plan to reopen the Festival on Saturday morning, on schedule. Staff, volunteers and artists banded together, bearing testament to the importance of the Festival for both the artists and the Omaha community.

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The onsite jury, in charge of selecting Festival award recipients, was unable to complete the assessment of all artists' booths before the storm hit. It was quickly decided by all of the artists, volunteers and staff to generously donate the award money to the relief fund set up for the Boys Scout camp in Little Sioux, Iowa, which was destroyed by a tornado just two weeks prior. The donation was made in the name of the award sponsor Omaha Steaks, all OSAF artists and local Boy Scout Troop #20, which has served as the Festival's on-site clean-up crew for many years. In addition, all artists from the 2008 Festival were invited to exhibit in 2009, bypassing the jury.

NAIA presented OSAF with the following award on August 6, 2008:

“For being fully prepared with an excellent emergency plan, for following through with the plan to protect the lives and property and for making compassionate decisions regarding award money and next year's show jury, NAIA is honoring the 2008 Omaha Summer Arts Festival staff as our first entry into the newly created NAIA Hall of Fame.”

For more information about the Omaha Summer Arts Festival presented by First National Bank, please visit www.SummerArts.org.

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