**GIFT STORE REPORT**

**DEC. 2023**

Income: $846.21

The Gift Store did quite well considering that we had to keep it closed due to rain conditions during part of the month. When it rains, mud flows from the animal pens down into the parking lot and makes for a mess that would be walked into the two stores, and a lack of Park staff to do clean-up makes the problem even greater. The Christmas in the Barnyard event was very popular and brought many visitors into our two stores.

The Gift and Book Store staff wish all of you a “Very Merry and Happy New Year 2024”!

GOOD-BYE TO OUR FRIEND JEFF WHEAT

We first met Jeff in 2006 when Becki joined the FOHP Board and took over as Gift Store manager. Jeff was the one who orchestrated the *very successful* over-flow concerts in the Hart Mansion during Cowboy Festival. We were amazed at the number of people who would gladly pay a significant amount for a ticket in order to sit in Bill Hart’s living room and listen to cowboys sing and tell stories. Later, when NHM restrictions were put into place which limited the capacity for indoor performances in the mansion, Jeff switched to offering programs put on by western authors who told stories about famous cowboys, such as Wyatt Earp. This was not quite the same as musical entertainment, but it all worked out under Jeff’s leadership. Then there were the August Silents Under the Stars events where Jeff would search for a rare William S. Hart silent film, even going to the Library of Congress for a pristine copy of his chosen film.

Jeff was a showman from an early age and had a band as a teenager. He continued to be in “the business” and even did some acting, once as the sidekick to Clint Eastwood. In later years he became a cameraman and stage manager in the filming of television game shows, spending his last summer in Atlanta doing the Family Feud production.

Several years back, Jeff began helping the Gift and Book Stores during Cowboy Festival and the annual Pow-wow. During the Covid shut-down, Jeff and Roger added bookshelves to the Book Store, starting with several which Jeff donated. The remodeled interior increased the number of books which were displayed for sale, and increased the profits in both stores. Jeff continued to volunteer at the Book Store (when he was in town and not filming) right up to the time he became critically ill. The Book Store volunteers enjoyed each other’s company and worked as a team to help store shoppers, and Jeff could always be counted on to “spin a tale” about an entertainment personality or film while finding special book for a customer. No one could do this subject area as well as Jeff, and he really enjoyed talking to the customers. The Store staff will miss Jeff and the talent he shared with us.

Jeff shared his cancer diagnosis with us this last summer (Merkel Cell Cancer). This cancer is extremely serious, and we all joined in giving Jeff support. I am a cancer survivor of nearly 30 years and Jeff and I talked about the disease and his treatment. It was heart breaking to watch Jeff fight this terrible disease and we did what we could to support him. Close to the end Jeff’s wife, Pam, brought him over to the stores to visit with us on a sunny Saturday morning, and we all enjoyed seeing him, and Jeff was pleased to visit with us with what would turn out to be the last time. We thank Pam for giving us that opportunity and we know that it was tough on Jeff, but he made the effort.

I hope that we can remember with love our “do it my way” guy who put so much of himself into Hart Park and the Friends of Hart Park. Jeff’s memory will live here for a very long time.

Becki Basham

Roger Basham