

Rosie the Riveters to attend Secret City Festival

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on May 23, 2016)

I first met Alison Beatty at the Secret City Festival a couple of years ago. She is a vivacious and entertaining personality. She obviously identifies with all ages and especially knows how to communicate effectively with children. An amazing example of that is to see her play the guitar and sing for young children who stand entranced by her performance.

She has become a standard part of our Secret City Festival by participating in the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association's historical artifact display featuring many of Lloyd and Betty Stokes' artifacts. You can see her in the A and B rooms of the Civic Center with members of ORHPA.

I was excited when I learned of Alison's plans for this coming Secret City Festival. Here are the plans to bring a group of Rosie the Riveters to visit Oak Ridge in Alison's own words:

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The Willow Run Rosies are a group of women dedicated to preserving the Willow Run Bomber Plant near Detroit, Michigan, where Rose Will Monroe, the original "Rosie the Riveter," built B-24 Liberator bomber planes. With continued support, the old bomber plant will become the National Museum of Aviation and Technology at Historic Willow Run. (For more information on that exciting project, readers can visit www.SaveTheBomberPlant.org)

Over 25,000 women worked at Willow Run during the war effort. The "Tribute" Rosies dress in coveralls and polkadot bandannas to honor their service and the service of women all across the country during World War II - for example, women like the Calutron Girls of Oak Ridge!

The Rosies learned about the Secret City Festival through me knowing Lloyd and Betty Stokes, but many of the Rosies knew the history of Oak Ridge through reading *The Girls of Atomic City* by Denise Kiernan.

We are thrilled to be able to attend in person this year!

So far planning the trip has been a breeze. I checked the Secret City Festival website to determine if there was a partner hotel for the event - and there is, the Comfort Inn of Oak Ridge. One of their managers, Kate Groover, has been as pleasant and helpful as I could ever hope for in arranging our rooms. She's been very flexible as the size of the group has changed!

The much more difficult part of planning was making sure we fit in as many of the wonderful activities at Secret City Festival as we can. Our group wants to tour as much of the remaining nuclear facilities as possible. We are signed up for the Y-12 National Security Complex tour on Friday at 10:00 am.

We will also be touring the Graphite Reactor on Saturday morning! The Secret City Festival website was helpful here to figure out what all we needed to see.

Even though I've visited Oak Ridge about six times since 2012 I still get a touch confused about the names of all the facilities. I don't think the Rosies would be very happy if I took them on the same tour twice!

Several helpful people at various facilities around town have helped confirm that we'll be seeing different and spectacular things on each day (special shout-out to you, Ray, for getting me started, for Karen and Barbara at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Fred and Glenda at the American Museum of Science and Energy for helping me figure it all out).

As for visiting the festival itself, we are very much looking forward to spending lots of time in the history exhibits. We would love to meet some of the original Calutron girls and any other veterans of The Project if possible!

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I can't wait to introduce the Rosies to all my friends in this spirited city. We'll also try to catch the reenactment on Saturday afternoon, as well as spend time wandering the festival doing what we do best - posing for pictures and retelling the incredible story of Willow Run.

Keep an eye out for 8 - 10 "Rosie the Riveters" while you're at the festival - that will certainly be us! We will also be attending the open air concerts in the evenings.

It's so exciting that the Festival organizers booked Grand Funk Railroad - they are from our very own Flint, Michigan, and we love them dearly! And of course the Charlie Daniels Band is incredible as well.

The very hardest part of planning the trip was deciding where to eat. There's so much good food in Oak Ridge and I want the Rosies to get a great taste of southern cooking while they're here. Thanks to your excellent guidance and my own adventures over the past years, we've selected Aubrey's, Dean's, the Soup Kitchen, and Jefferson Fountain.

We sincerely hope to meet as many Oak Ridgers as possible on this trip and to help celebrate the Atomic City as hard as we can during our stay. If you think of anything else we should do, places we should go, or people we should meet, please let me know!

Thank you for graciously displaying the Southern hospitality that has made this trip so delightful to put together.

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Now what do you think about that? Alison Beatty is sure an Ambassador for Oak Ridge (the Atomic City). You can join the Rosies on these tours. Check out the schedule here:

Look at the entire festival here: www.secretcityfestival.com

To register for Y-12 tours: <http://www.y12.doe.gov/secretcity/register.php>

To register for the DOE Public Tour: <http://amse.org/2016-doe-public-bus-tour/>

Thank you Alison and we look forward to you and your group of Rosies visiting Oak Ridge!

I hope you agree with me regarding the potential we have to capitalize on HERITAGE TOURISM! The Secret City Festival is an excellent example of that. We need more of that type event for all age groups. We must learn what those folks younger than millennials will support if we are to be successful in the long run!

As you may know, I am a board member of the newly formed Secret City Festival Non-Profit organization created to expand the concept of our Secret City Festival. We plan to gain private funding for growing the festival into a much greater celebration of the diverse potential Oak Ridge may have for several more festivals to be included in a whole series of events and activities.

These Rosies see our Secret City Festival as a destination event and have organized a trip especially to attend that event. Can't you tell they are really excited! And they are traveling from Michigan just to attend our festival!!! I am convinced there are other "Rosies" groups out there.

We just need to learn how to best promote our city and its events more broadly. We need to include our city activities with surrounding regional events and activities. The synergy could be tremendous!

An example is a group of some 40 people from Virginia who signed up for a "Mystery Tour" that included Knoxville, a full day in Oak Ridge and dinner at the Museum of Appalachia. We need to work with our

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surrounding neighboring communities to plan these visits so Heritage Tourists stay the night in Oak Ridge.

I am convinced that can be done by working with our regional neighbors. From the Coal Miner Museum in Rocky Top, to Norris Dam, to the Museum of Appalachia, to the Green McAdoo Cultural Center, to Oak Ridge's Manhattan Project National Historical Park and Knoxville, we are poised to reap the benefits of regional Heritage Tourism.

Let's work together to make it happen!



The Rosies pose by the historical marker for the Willow Run Factory



"Rosie" Alison Beatty entertains children at last year's Secret City Festival