

WIREGRASS FESTIVAL

1996 theme "FLAME THE FIRE ANT"

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Wiregrass Festival press release

A native meets a newcomer in Turner County beginning March 20, 1996 in Ashburn, Georgia.

The Wiregrass Festival kicks off its first year ever with the 1996 theme "Flame the Fire Ant." So what is all this about wiregrass and fire ants?

It's a giant celebration! It's jam-packed with fun, excitement, flaming fire ants, food, collectibles, arts & crafts and pretty much anything else that can be squeezed into a five-day festival.

The fun begins Wednesday, March 20, at the Tabernacle in Ashburn with a county-wide prayer meeting a gospel sing. The festivities start there this year because all profits from the festival will go toward renovating the tabernacle into a park facility for the whole world to enjoy.

On Thursday, March 21, the Ashburn Women's Club is sponsoring a beauty contest to find the best looking southern belles in Turner County. The winner will represent Turner County through the coming year in other events. Some entertainment for later in the festival will tour through the schools, including Georgia's own Cowboy poets. If nothing else, you've got to hear what these two poets of the saddle have to say about western life. They have hinted a "Flame the Fire Ant" poem may be ready by festival time.

Friday, March 20, things jump into high gear and continue wide-open through Sunday, March 22. Vendors begin setting up Friday. We need your help here. We want YOU to vote for the best arts & crafts display. Each vendor will have a can to collect pennies. One penny, one vote. Vote as often as you like. At the end of the show, we'll collect all the pennies and announce the winner. At one cent per vote, you'll be able to vote pretty often.

Hungry? We can help. If our fine restaurants don't interest you, have something to eat on the festival grounds.

Entertainment comes on line. Local bands, those cowboy poets, local singers and maybe a storyteller or two. Whoop and holler as line dancers do their best with a "Fire Ant" dance. Who is the best? We'll all find out together. A street dance is in the works.

A collector's show will allow you to look at some interesting, possibly odd, collections. What will be there? You've gotta come see it for yourself. We'll be awarding prizes during the collector's show as well.

HOW TO GET THERE

Turner County and Ashburn (the county seat) is located on Interstate 75 halfway between Tifton (south) and Cordele (north) and about halfway between Macon (north) and Valdosta (south). Exit 29 is the north exit and Exit 28 is the south and main exit. Coming off the interstate, turn west and you head right into downtown on Highway 112, known as Washington Avenue in town. When you see the giant peanut on I-75, you know you're there.

The festival will take place downtown, at Community National Bank's historic Thrasher House, Ashburn Bank Heritage Park, the Turner County Civic Center, the tabernacle and a few other places, all within easy walking distance of each other. Once you get to town, look for the special festival edition of the local newspaper *The Wiregrass Farmer*, which will have a schedule of events, map of the grounds and plenty of things to see and do in Turner County as well as a guide to our businesses.

SO WHAT IS WIREGRASS

Wiregrass is a native grass that grows in the southern reaches of Georgia and Alabama. In fact, the southern part of Alabama is known as the Wiregrass region. In those picturesque pine forest landscape paintings, the grass you see growing is most often wiregrass. It grows in clumps and falls over from its own slight weight to spread out.

Wiregrass was very important not too many years ago when cattle ranching was a much more important industry than it is today. During the winter, free range and large-range penned cattle could survive by eating wiregrass when other foodstuffs had disappeared.

Few things are as distinctly southern as wiregrass.

This year's theme, Flame the Fire Ant, sprang out of a tentative name for the festival. There are actually two types of fire ants in South Georgia, one native and one from South America. Fire ants get their name from the stinging and painful bite they give when agitated. They build large colonies in mounds and have been known to cooperate between mounds.

Much work is devoted every year at agriculture experiment stations to fire ant control.

The fire ant most people think of is the exotic import, which arrived on a boat from South American. The tiny insect found the South to its liking and has taken up permanent residence here. It is now a fixture of the South. The Festival chose to "flame the fire ant" as a humorous theme for our first ever festival.

OTHER STUFF

Turner County is the northern beginning point for the Plantation Trace district of Georgia. The Plantation Trace is considered the "typical" southern region with many fine antebellum homes, magnificent estates and some of the finest wild and plantation quail hunting you could ever ask for. We've got some of the premier fishing holes in the world in the Plantation Trace as well.

Turner County has several area motels and RV stations. Our business district has something for everyone with antique shops, historic buildings, unique dining and other places that can meet your every need.

If you need more information, call our Chamber of Commerce at 912-567-9696 or our Publicity Chairman at 912-567-3655 (day) 912-567-2222 (eve)

We look forward to hosting your visit with us in late March.