



Memorial in Claremore  
Birthplace Ranch in Oologah

## Will Rogers Memorial Commission

Jim Hartz, Chairman • Steve Turnbo, Vice Chairman  
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### A Statement Regarding the Governor's Proposal to Consolidate the Will Rogers Memorial Museums with the Oklahoma Historical Society

The Will Rogers Memorial Commission understands the severity of the budget crisis facing the State of Oklahoma and appreciates Governor Brad Henry and the Legislature's diligent efforts to address the situation. The Commission, however, respectfully disagrees with Governor Henry's proposal to consolidate the Will Rogers Memorial Museums with the Oklahoma Historical Society. The latter is a fine institution with a clear mission focused on the history of Oklahoma and its people and an outstanding record of preserving and sharing that history.

The Will Rogers Memorial Commission, too, has a clear mission and a fine record. Its Museums are among the most sought after and attended in the state. They stand unique as interpreters of one man, one Oklahoman who has transcended generations, whose humor and wisdom continue to be studied, enjoyed, and appreciated by people from throughout the world.

The Will Rogers Memorial Commission respectfully requests that the Governor and members of the Legislature of Oklahoma consider the following in their deliberations:

**The Will Rogers Memorial Commission was uniquely formed.** It was established by Oklahoma statute seventy-three years ago specifically "to operate and maintain" a memorial to Will Rogers, the late beloved son of the state. Later that same year, 1937, Betty Blake Rogers deeded to the Commission twenty acres of land in Claremore for the express purpose of building on the property a memorial to her late husband to be administered by the Commission.

**Our mission is uniquely focused: *to collect, preserve, and share the life, wisdom, and humor of Will Rogers for all generations.*** Ours is a mission focused on an international figure, one of tremendous political, social, and cultural impact. The Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore, and Will Rogers Birthplace Ranch, Oologah, comprise one of the largest sets of museums in the country dedicated to a single person who was not a political leader or military figure. He was at the time of his death the highest rated male motion picture box office star in the country, the most widely syndicated newspaper columnist, the most listened to radio commentator, and the most sought after public speaker. He was a proud Oklahoman and Cherokee of international renown.

**Your Will Rogers Museums are heavily visited, internationally respected, economically significant:** The two Museum sites welcomed almost 165,000 visitors in 2009, the highest number in eight years. Visitors came from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 30 foreign countries and territories. In an average month, the Memorial saw guests from 44 states and 12 nations. Only about a third of our visitors came from Oklahoma. The economic impact: \$17,696,250.\*

**Our staff is lean, efficient, professional, and competent:** Only seven full-time and six part-time personnel (9.9 FTE vs. 16.5 allowed by statute) staff the Commission's two museum sites. Yet, both museums are open 3,285 hours per year. Staff members are cross-trained to perform tasks in

\*based on percentage of out-of-state travelers at \$165 per non-overnight person per trip (OTRD, 2008)

multiple areas. A significant percentage of our men and women hold college degrees and have received specialized training in their areas of responsibilities.

**The Commission and staff have reacted positively and responsibly to the budget crisis.** The Commission has taken the following actions to meet the mandated reductions to date:

- rebid contract for janitorial services, June 2009 (annualized savings: approximately \$14,000);
- rebid contract for natural gas, July 2009 (annualized savings: approximately \$8,000);
- instituted hiring freeze, July 2009;
- required permission of Director and Assistant Director on all purchases, no minimum;
- cancelled service contract for HVAC system, Memorial Museum, November 2009 (annualized savings: approximately \$17,500);
- eliminated overtime, January 2010 (annualized savings: approximately \$6,000);
- reduced contracted janitorial services and moved majority of custodial services in-house, January 2010 (annualized savings: approximately \$30,000; staff members now dust and wet mop, vacuum, clean restrooms, empty trash, and perform all other tasks necessary to maintain both museums in pristine condition);
- submitted and won approval from the Office of Personnel Management of a furlough plan of up to one day per month (two days for the executive director), January 2010;
- authorized a feasibility study to institute admission charges at both museums; and
- authorized a feasibility study of the impact of reducing operating hours at both museums.

**Will Rogers' legacy is alive, vibrant, and thriving.**

- 7 new books known to be in press or in progress
- 4 dissertations completed in the past two years
- a new documentary scheduled for release in 2011
- a Will Rogers course of study in development at Rogers State University
- a new one-man show opening in Chicago in March
- a new 8-part children's series running now in Oklahoma newspapers
- highlighted in a public television documentary in Ireland
- a retracing of his life through music and film now in production in New York
- a rope-spinning "Will Rogers" appearing nightly in the Cirque Du Soleil in Las Vegas
- frequent local and regional productions of the Tony Award-winning *Will Rogers Follies*
- 210 members from throughout the country in the Museums' Friends of Will Rogers
- 21 docents and another 10 soon in training
- more than 3,750 volunteer hours contributed in the past 18 months
- 7.9 percent increase in annual attendance in 2009

The mission and focus of the Will Rogers Memorial Museums are unique. Our staff is small and capable. Our operations are efficient. The Museums are a proven success. We invite you to visit and experience firsthand. In the meantime, if you have questions, please contact: Steve Gragert, Executive Director, skgragert@willrogers.com, 918 343 8118 (office), 405 612 1965 (mobile). Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Hartz, Chairman