Julia Duvall | September 23, 2025

ROGER SMOKER, JACKSON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES NAMED 2025 MOUNTAIN HERITAGE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Western Carolina University will honor the recipients of the 2025 Mountain Heritage Awards during the Mountain Heritage Days Afternoon Concert, scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 27, at the Bardo Arts Center.

Presented annually by the chancellor of WCU, the Mountain Heritage Awards recognize one individual and one organization for outstanding contributions to the preservation, interpretation, or research of Southern Appalachian history and culture. Recipients are selected by a committee of university and community representatives.

Roger Smoker, photo by Scott McKie B.P./Cherokee One Feather

This year's individual award will be presented to Roger Smoker, a Robbinsville native and elder of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Smoker served with the U.S. Forest Service from the 1980s until 2016 and now works as a consultant and translator for Dadiwonisi, an adult Cherokee language program. A first-language Cherokee speaker from Tutiyi (Snowbird), Smoker chairs the Cherokee Speakers Council and is a passionate advocate for the revitalization of Cherokee language in the Eastern Band. With fewer than 200 fluent speakers remaining in North Carolina, Smoker's efforts are vital to ensuring the language thrives for future generations.

The organizational award will be presented to the Jackson County Public Libraries, recognized for their commitment to preserving and promoting Southern Appalachian culture. The libraries (located in Sylva and in Cashiers) serve as a repository for regional literature and cultural materials.

The Sylva location's Community Room provides space for nonprofit events, talks, and meetings. Both the Jackson County Genealogical and Historical Societies and the Rotunda Gallery, which is operated by the Jackson County Arts Council, are housed in the Sylva location. The gallery hosts rotating exhibits throughout the year, many focusing on mountain heritage and partners regularly with the Mountain Heritage Center to host mini exhibitions on regional history and culture.

The Sylva location is housed in the former courthouse overlooking downtown Sylva, serving as a beloved symbol of the mountain town.

The Albert Carlton - Cashiers Community Library is located at 249 Frank Allen Road in Cashiers. The library serves full-time and seasonal residents with weekly programming, events, local history and genealogical resources.

The Jackson County Public Libraries also support community education and engagement. More than 3,000 patrons use their broadband and Wi-Fi services annually and over 8,000 people attend library programs each year.

Admission to the afternoon concert is free, but advanced registration is required for seating. The Burnette Sisters and Bailey Mountain Cloggers will kick-off the main stage event.

For more information about Mountain Heritage Day and the awards ceremony, visit mhd.wcu.edu.

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