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Juneteenth Celebrations Bolstered by the PA Tourism Office

Grants provided to seven organizations will expand Juneteenth celebrations

HARRISBURG, PA – The Wolf Administration joined the nonprofit Voices Underground in announcing the seven recipients of the Journeying Toward Freedom grants through the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, which will support Juneteenth celebrations across the commonwealth in 2022.

“Juneteenth is an especially important holiday because it recognizes the day our nation began moving toward fulfilling its destiny as a nation where all people are free,” said Carrie Fischer Lepore, Deputy Secretary for Marketing, Tourism and Film with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). “I am proud that we are not only helping to give this important holiday the recognition it deserves, but that we are uplifting the stories of many Americans who have historically been underrepresented in our cultural assets. By promoting Juneteenth, we are demonstrating that we are a commonwealth that is welcoming to and respectful of all people.”

This is the first year for the [Journeying Toward Freedom](#) grant program, which was established by the Pennsylvania Tourism Office in partnership with Voices Underground as part of a commitment to seeing Pennsylvania become the nation’s leader in African American cultural heritage tourism and ensuring the stories of all Pennsylvanians are uplifted and heard.

[Voices Underground](#), a Chester County-based organization with extensive experience in promoting African American cultural history through scholarly research, transformative experiences, and historical memorialization, is administering the 2022 Journeying Toward Freedom in partnership with the Pennsylvania Tourism Office. In 2021, Voices Underground assisted with Chester County efforts to organize a multi-day Juneteenth festival that included walking tours, exhibits, performances, and artists talks, that celebrated African American history and culture.

“We are especially thrilled to partner with the Pennsylvania Tourism Office as we look for creative ways to share stories, experiences and most of all as we look to customize invitations for all ‘truth seekers’ to journey together while we unbury and recite the complete American narrative,” said Alex Parham, co-executive director of Voices Underground. “I am reminded of a quote by Desmond Tutu, ‘My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.’ I am also appreciative of the actions taken after this holiday has been approved at the national level. The process of creating this holiday, the change that would need to occur to get

people's minds and spirits in the right place, is really what we want. We are heading in the best direction right now."

Juneteenth, a portmanteau of June 19, celebrates the anniversary of the day in 1865 that news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached Galveston, Texas, and enslaved African Americans became aware that they had been freed. [In 2019, Governor Tom Wolf declared June 19 of each year as Juneteenth National Freedom Day.](#) Last year, President Joe Biden signed legislation recognizing Juneteenth as a federal holiday.

"I am proud of Governor Wolf and this administration for recognizing Juneteenth as a state holiday," said LaDeshia Maxwell, executive director of the Governor's Commission on African American Affairs. "As the Pennsylvania Tourism Office and Voice Underground announce today's grant recipients, my commission and I ask that all residents around the commonwealth no matter your racial or ethnic backgrounds learn and teach our youth about this special holiday, and urge them to attend these (or other local) celebrations to learn more about our nation's history so we can truly move forward together."

This year's Juneteenth festivals in Pennsylvania will include music, visual art, culinary art, spoken word productions, history presentations, and recognition of Black-owned businesses.

"As one of America's largest annual festivals committed to telling the story of our nation's history and founding, we are humbled to be included in such a cohort of amazing organizations dedicated to commemorating Juneteenth across our commonwealth," said Michael DelBene, president and CEO of Welcome America, Inc.

A total of \$89,000 is being awarded through the grant program. These grants were awarded based on criteria that included historical significance, communications and marketing plans, educational outreach, volunteer resources and matching funds. The seven recipients of the 2022 Journeying Toward Freedom grants are:

- Juneteenth Lehigh Valley, Lehigh Valley - \$10,000
- NAACP Johnstown Branch, Johnstown - \$4,000
- Sherman Theater, Monroe County - \$15,000
- Stop The Violence, Pittsburgh - \$15,000
- The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau, State College - \$15,000
- Welcome America, Inc., Philadelphia - \$15,000
- Young Professionals of Color, Harrisburg - \$15,000

In addition to Journeying Toward Freedom, [the Pennsylvania Tourism Office is investing \\$6.8 million](#) in new initiatives that will promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in marketing, messaging, and product development to capture greater market share and, most importantly, in our approach to how we welcome travelers to the commonwealth leaving a positive impact on the industry for decades to come.

The Pennsylvania Tourism Office, housed within the Department of Community and Economic Development, is dedicated to inspiring travel to Pennsylvania. From iconic attractions to hidden gems, tourism in Pennsylvania helps support the state's economy and creates jobs for local businesses – all while improving residents' quality of life.

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