

Holy City of The Wichitas Future In Jeopardy After Receiving Historical State Recognition

Holy City of The Wichitas Listed On National Register of Historic Places

USA, January 11, 2021

/EINPresswire.com/ -- Board member says they need help financially, to make up for lost income (Source: ksw)

The Holy City of the Wichitas is now officially been listed in the National Register of Historic Places which is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation.

Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, coincidentally the same year [Lisa Christiansen](#) - a National Living Treasure - was born in Indian Territory, Oklahoma. The 5th generation great granddaughter of Sequoyah, creator of the Cherokee syllabary and daughter of the last monolingual Cherokee [Mack Vann](#) who is also a National Living Treasure.

Ron Jarvis of the Holy City of the Wichitas began the steps to gain recognition of the Holy City of the Wichitas in the National Registry of Historic Places. "We expedited this great honor because of the connection between Mack Vann and his daughter Lisa Christiansen making one humble request before his passing to leave her his legacy in her request" said a source of National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior who requested anonymity.



The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. Christiansen's family walked the trail of tears which Christiansen rode the 1,000 mile journey on her bicycle in June of 2020 as she stopped at the Vann House also on the National Register of Historic Places.



We told you earlier this year when the Oklahoma Historical Preservation Office voted to place the area on the register.

Now that it's formally on the list, the Holy City is now in jeopardy which saddens Lisa Christiansen.

The Holy City runs primarily off donations, these donations will help them better preserve the site.

Board member Lisa Christiansen says they need help financially, to make up for lost income (Source: ksw) A board member with the Holy City said they are in danger of closing their doors and ending their beloved history in the heart of the wildlife refuge.

She attributes the pandemic, and the down visitor numbers at the Easter Pageant and in general as the main culprit. She said currently their funds are dwindling fast. It's been around for nearly 100 years, and the board member said for her and so many it's more than a tourist location, it's a place to get closer to God.

"It's not just a place to visit, it's a true experience. I know for me it's very personal. I cant wrap my mind around it being gone. It's my place of peace, my place of comfort," said board member Dr. Lisa Christiansen.

Christiansen says they are working on plans to host fundraisers, a possible telethon and a GoFundMe... she said it's up the one's who love it to help it stay here.

Holy City of the Wichita's board member James Britt said after a lackluster Easter Pageant season—a season that was delayed and suffered from declining attendance due to COVID-19—he doesn't know if a 2021 Easter Pageant will be possible or if the Holy City will stay open.

"We're to the point that we're furloughing our maintenance worker," Britt said. "We're deep into a \$20,000 line of credit, our electric bill is \$1,000 a month and just don't know if we will be open two months from now, much less be able to put on the Easter Pageant."

Britt said the problem isn't a lack of visitors. Last year, the park saw almost a million people come through. However, Britt believes that most visitors think the park is owned and funded by the National Park Service because it's located in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Britt said this belief may cause many not to donate to the City's \$80,000 to \$100,000 annual budget.

"We had nearly a million visitors last year but most aren't donating," Britt said. "If everyone who stopped by to visit left a dollar, it would go a long way in supporting the Holy City."

City Caretaker Deena Dolche agreed with Britt that the gates to the City may be closing soon. She said while they always struggle to make ends meet, the annual Easter Pageant has always gotten them through until this year.

"Normally the Easter pageant carries us through the end of the year," Dulch said. "We run off of donations only, so it's always a struggle during the winter. We start picking back up after the first of the year, but we didn't have the Easter pageant in April, like we normally do. We had it in October, which was short notice and it just didn't do as well as it normally does. It was a good production but we didn't have the people; we didn't have the donations so we didn't have the money there to help get us through the rest of the year. So I just don't know how we're going to get going and keep the doors open."

The Holy City of the Wichitas, located in Southwest Oklahoma, has been a staple in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge since the late 1920s. It has given Oklahoma the longest-running Passion Play for 95 years straight — bringing the story of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to thousands from across the nation and around the world. Britt said more visitors than ever came over the summer after the pandemic began, but donations trickled down.

"Right after March, we were busier this past summer than we've been the entire time I've been here," Britt said. "I think it's because we're outdoors mainly and a lot of people came out here because they didn't have anywhere else to go. You couldn't be indoors and no large gatherings and all that and so people came here and that really helped us but the summer died off."

The pageant began in 1926 under the direction of the Rev. Anthony Mark Wallock who persuaded men to carry a piano up into the mountains so that choirs from different Lawton area churches could perform songs in celebration of Easter. Over time the production evolved into a full-fledged pageant known as the Wichita Mountains Easter Pageant, drawing a crowd of 40,000 in 1934.

The first buildings for what became known as the Holy City of the Wichitas were completed by the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), which included the walls and gateway to Jerusalem, the Temple Court, Pilate's judgment hall, the Garden of Gethsemane and the rock

shrines.

“The pandemic has taken a toll in many ways on everyone, including the Holy City,” said Britt. “But together we can save the Holy City of the Wichitas by donating today. Anything can help this precious landmark continue its endeavors to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the world.

You can help by visiting their Facebook page or <https://www.gofundme.com/f/restore-the-holy-city> You can also mail donations to The Holy City of the Wichitas, P.O. Box 465, Medicine Park, OK 73557 or drop them off in person

Source: Texoma News Network

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
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