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For More Information, Contact:
Amber Parker, Ijams Executive Director
865-577-4717, ext. 118 / aparker@ijams.org

Ijams Nature Center's Symphony in the Park Rebrands to Twilight at Ijams

Ijams Nature Center's most important annual fundraiser is getting an update, and with it comes a new name: Twilight at Ijams.

The 2021 Twilight at Ijams, presented by Clayton and Colonial Pipeline Company, will take place Sunday, Sept. 12, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Tickets will be available in July.

Formerly Ijams Nature Center's Symphony in the Park, the new name reflects the continuing focus of this beloved event: To raise awareness and funds for the nature center so that Ijams can continue to educate and inspire people of all ages to appreciate and care for the natural world.

"We've known we needed to change the name because, while Ijams Nature Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, many in the community are under the impression that it is a City of Knoxville park and is fully funded by the City," Ijams Executive Director Amber Parker said. "Additionally, we continue to hear many in the community as well as some attendees believe the event is supporting the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, not Ijams Nature Center.

"Being transparent with donors and honoring their intent are incredibly important for Ijams. Realizing that people might be purchasing tickets from Ijams and thinking they were supporting the KSO with their funds was troubling. It was time to rebrand the event to create clarity."

The original event was created as a fundraiser for the nature center 36 years ago by Sherri Lee, the late Bill Miller, M.D., and other members of the Ijams Board of Directors.

"My goal was to raise new friends and funds for Ijams. I wanted a unique event that would appeal to a large number of people," Ijams Board of Directors Emeritus Member Sherri Lee said. "Sitting on picnic blankets and enjoying symphonic music under the stars seemed magical. It has been an incredible evening and the KSO has been creative, imaginative, fanciful, lyrical and fun."

The event has grown and changed over the years, including moving from picnic blankets to tables, adding guest musical artists and introducing a featured visual artist.

The pandemic forced another change in 2020: Ijams planned a virtual experience, and, due to another rainy forecast, held the event – Ijams Nature Center's Symphony **from** the Park – inside the Emporium Building.

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That evening featured three new performers after the KSO was unable to play. The overwhelmingly positive reaction to the music in 2020 – a blend of bluegrass, classical and Appalachian – brought the realization that Ijams could create space for new artists and rotate performers from musical genres to expand the reach and diversity of the event. While still including the KSO in the rotation, it would be a way to increase relevancy with new audiences while also honoring the past.

Both the name and programmatic changes were approved by the Ijams Board of Directors and received the blessing of the event's co-presenting sponsors.

Carl Hill, Vice President of Marketing for Clayton Homes, is enthusiastic about the change.

"This event has always been special, but rebranding and focusing the spotlight on Ijams Nature Center's story will make it even more so," Hill said. "Ijams has been and continues to be an important part of this community. Clayton is proud to return as a presenting sponsor of Twilight at Ijams."

"The KSO has been a wonderful partner and has done an amazing job," Parker said. "In addition to being featured cyclically for Twilight at Ijams, I look forward to finding new ways we can work together."

"This year's musical performance will be created by classically trained pianist and WUOT 'Afternoon Concert' host Melony Dodson, who has music-directed a host of local theatre productions and has numerous connections in the region. The program will feature nature-themed music, including Broadway, classical, Appalachian and other genres. It will illustrate a day at Ijams from dawn's first light to twilight. I'm excited about the program and the opportunities it will provide."

Ijams Nature Center is a nonprofit, 318-acre educational nature center for all ages, abilities and walks of life. Ijams' mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Located just three miles from downtown Knoxville, Ijams features 12+ miles of hiking and mixed-use trails, a public access river dock, climbing, boating, biking and more. The center offers hundreds of educational programs annually for all ages. The Ijams grounds and trails are open every day from 8 a.m. until dusk. The Visitor Center is open daily from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. For more information, visit Ijams.org.

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