



Neches River Festival

LXXVI

Join Us for Springtime on the Neches

April 3 – April 13, 2024

Overview and General Information

The Neches River Festival is a time-honored tradition celebrating its 76th year. History and tradition have been the foundation of the Neches River Festival since 1949. The NRF celebrates our area high school seniors and highlights the economic and social opportunities that our valued natural resource, the Neches River, provides to our community.

Supported by this year's theme, "**A River of New Beginnings**," it is the goal of the Neches River Festival to provide our youth with opportunities for many exciting "new beginnings" this year, including making new friends, sharing in new experiences, and learning more about themselves and our community, all while creating memories to last a lifetime.

We look forward to a full season of festival events during Neches River Festival LXXVI, including social parties, educational opportunities, and city-wide events. We are thrilled to be hosting our sixth annual "Capes and Crowns" 1K/5K Fun Run, which will take place on February 10, 2023, in conjunction with Mardi Gras of Southeast Texas. We will also connect our youth to the Neches River through our annual "River Day" event hosted by the Lower Neches Valley Authority. This event educates our youth on the important social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of our river and community. Further, continuing a tradition, Festival participants will "connect and serve" by collecting and donating children's books to promote reading and literacy in our community.

Additionally, during the Festival's magical season, a longtime civic leader is honored as Citizen of the Year, a King is chosen, and the celebration culminates with the Coronation of a Queen and her royal court at the Julie Rogers Theatre. At the Coronation, each Princess and her Escort are presented to the audience, and the Coronation concludes with the announcement of a Queen selected from the Princesses. We invite all local high school senior girls to join the Royal Court as a Neches River Festival Princess. Junior or Senior girls outside of the Beaumont area are invited to be a Duchess of the Royal Court and represent their hometown and state. The Festival concludes with an enchanted evening of dining and dancing at the Coronation Ball held at the Beaumont Civic Center.

REGISTRATION

Registration forms for Princesses, Duchesses, Escorts, and Duchess Escorts can be found on the Neches River Festival's website at www.nechesriverfestival.com (under the FORMS tab). Registration forms may be submitted online (preferred) or to the Neches River Festival Office at 2615 Calder Street, Suite 400, Beaumont, Texas, 77702.

The deadline for submitting all Princess, Duchess, Escort, and Duchess Escort registration forms is Wednesday, November 1, 2023.

FEES

The participation fee for a **Princess is \$400**. Payment is due in full by January 21, 2024. The Princess fee includes all Festival events, including social parties, the service/river day, the parade, the Get Acquainted Dance, a NRF t-shirt, coronation flowers, and a ticket to the ball for the princess. A separate fee of \$200 is charged for each escort, but this is generally paid by the escort or his family. The escorts will receive information regarding fees and participation after the Princess has submitted his name and contact information to the Festival.

The participation fee for a **Duchess is \$350**. Payment is due in full by January 21, 2024. The fee includes all Festival events, including social parties, the parade, Get Acquainted Dance, a NRF t-shirt, Coronation flowers, and a ticket to the ball for the duchess. A separate fee of \$200 is charged for each duchess escort, but this is generally paid for by the duchess escort or his family.

These fees do NOT include tickets to the Coronation or to the Ball for parents or any of the guests. These tickets must be purchased separately and will be available at a later date.

*****Fees will not be refunded after February 1, 2024*****

Our goal is for every interested student to participate; please contact the Neches River Festival office for more information if assistance is needed. The deadline for assistance is Monday, January 8, 2024.

PRINCESSES

Princesses are high school seniors that live in Beaumont or go to a Beaumont high school. Please read this overview in its entirety, read the information carefully and discuss it with your parents before completing the registration form online.

PRINCESS ESCORTS

The escort to a Princess should be a junior or senior from one of our Southeast Texas high schools. Experience shows that the best escort is a friend who you and your parents like and who will make the events fun and important. He, too, will be a representative of the Festival and an extension of you. When you invite your escort, please be certain that he checks his spring schedule to reserve the Festival dates. Conflicts with sports, travel, and end-of-year activities can be problematic. If you cannot secure an escort, the Neches River Festival will help place you with an escort. Please submit the Escort Registration Form with your Princess Registration Form online (preferred) or to the Neches River Festival office by the November 1, 2023 deadline.

There is a **\$200 fee** charged for escorts. This fee is paid by the escort or his family and covers participation in all events as well as the Coronation and Ball. Your escort will be responsible for the rental of his tuxedo. Details will be provided at the Escort Informational Meeting held on **January 21, 2024**. For questions regarding escorts, please contact the Neches River Festival office or the **Escort Chairs, Mellie Bevilacqua** at **409.363.4120**, melliepbevilacqua@gmail.com and **Jamie Pope** at **409.782.1910**, jamie@colonialtx.com.

DUCHESESSES

Duchesses are high school juniors or seniors that represent cities and states outside of Beaumont. They have always been a special part of the Royal Court and generally have ties to Beaumont through family, friends, businesses, or simply an interest in being a part of the Neches River Festival. If you have a cousin, friend, camp friend, or know of a young lady who would be interested in participation, please let us know! We can send interested parties more detailed information once we have their contact information. Those who come in from out of town often have more planning and arrangements to make, so earlier is better. The Duchess Registration Form is available online at www.nechesriverfestival.com under the FORMS tab. Please share this information with anyone you know who is interested!

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Princesses: We also ask that each Princess participate in the Festival as a Duchess Ambassador. As an Ambassador, the Neches River Festival will pair you with an out-of-town Duchess to help welcome her to Beaumont and ensure she is comfortable during the Festival events. A small welcome gift or basket of cookies and treats upon her arrival to Beaumont is a nice gesture. If you have a preference for a particular duchess, please send your name and the Duchess's name to **Duchess Chairmen, Beth Rogers** at **409.673.2748**, bethany_rogers2@att.net and **Julia Crager** at **251.753.7997**, atcheson_j@bellsouth.net. If you do not have a preference for a duchess, but you would like to participate as a Duchess Ambassador, we will assign a duchess to you and provide her contact information.

DUCHESS ESCORTS

Escorts for Duchesses are provided by the Neches River Festival office and are usually a junior or senior young man from one of the Beaumont high schools. If a Duchess has family ties or friend connections to a local young man and would like to select her own escort, that is encouraged and acceptable. This is an opportunity for all participants to make new friends and connections and to build on those relationships already established. There is a **\$200 fee** charged for Duchess Escorts. This fee includes participation in all events as well as the Coronation and Ball. He will be responsible for the rental of his tuxedo and details will be provided at the Escort Informational Meeting held on **January 21, 2024**. For questions regarding Duchess Escorts, please contact the Neches River Festival office or Duchess Escort Chairs, **Kirksey Reynolds** at **409.782.7883**, kirkseyreynolds@gmail.com and **Lindsey Ramey** at **409.656.9708**, lindseyramey1@gmail.com.

INTERVIEWS

Each Princess is asked to participate in an interview the week before the Coronation. Duchesses are interviewed the Saturday morning of the Coronation. There are approximately 10 to 12 judges, and you will be asked three to five questions, depending on the time and the length of your answers. This is an excellent opportunity to present yourself in an unfamiliar setting and become more comfortable with public speaking. The judges are members of the Beaumont community and love meeting the Princesses and Duchesses and hearing their answers. You are our future, and every year the judges comment on how amazing and strong our young people are. From these interviews, the Royal Court is selected: a Queen, a

First Lady in Waiting, a Second Lady in Waiting, a Third Lady in Waiting, and a Grand Duchess. All are announced at the end of the Coronation and then presented as Royalty at the Ball later that evening. To be selected is a special honor, but it is not the main purpose of the Neches River Festival. The interview form can be found on the Neches River Festival website under the PRINCESS tab or the FORMS tab. This information will be provided to the judges on the morning of the interviews. A resume is requested but not required. Please submit these documents at or before the Princess Informational Meeting on January 21, 2024.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPANTS

Neches River Festival Board Scholarship:

The Neches River Festival's Executive Board is pleased to offer SEVEN scholarships. Participants are encouraged to apply. From the applicants, six participants are chosen from our 2024 Princesses and Escorts to receive a \$1,000.00 scholarship, and one participant is chosen from our 2024 Duchesses to receive a \$1,000.00 scholarship. These scholarships can be used toward any college or higher learning experience. It is awarded based on a written essay, community involvement, and educational goals. To apply, please complete the online application found on the Neches River Festival website at www.nechesriverfestival.com under the SCHOLARSHIPS tab.

Lamar University Scholarship:

The Neches River Festival proudly supports our hometown university, Lamar University. All participants in the Neches River Festival, including Princesses, Duchesses, and Escorts, may apply for one of two \$2,500.00 scholarships awarded each year through the Neches River Festival Otho Plummer Scholarship. To apply, the applicant must be admitted to Lamar University and must login to www.lamar.edu/myscholarships with his or her LEA username and LU email password. Once logged in, the applicant can complete the 2023-2024 LU General Scholarship Application and answer "YES" to the question "Did you participate in the Neches River Festival?" More information about Lamar University can be found at www.lamar.edu.

ATTIRE

A highlight of the Neches River Festival is the formal presentation of each Princess and Duchess on the stage of the Julie Rogers Theatre at the Coronation.

*Princesses wear a white, floor-length presentation gown and elbow-length white gloves.

*Duchesses wear a floor-length presentation gown in the color of their choice (kindly refrain from wearing white) and elbow-length white gloves.

The style of the gown is your choice. Your escort will also be introduced to the audience and will meet you at center stage where you will make a formal bow to the audience. A tight dress or extravagant train might interfere with your presentation. Please contact our office if you have questions regarding styles, locations to buy, or other options needed. We also have many photos of dresses worn through the years for reference. Arrangements can be made to help you find a dress and participate. My Big White Festival Dress on Facebook is an option for available presentation gowns. Please visit our website at www.nechesriverfestival.com for examples of Princess and Duchess dresses.

There will be several other activities and parties for you to enjoy. Appropriate clothing for each event will vary, such as "Sunday Best" for the Princess Interviews and Duchess Interviews, sundress or cover-up for the pool party, costumes for the Parade and Get Acquainted Dance, your NRF t-shirt for the river day,

etc. Revealing tops, short shorts or skirts, or cut-off jeans are not to be worn to any of the above events. Each event is planned for you to enjoy and learn something, but you are also a representative of the Neches River Festival, and we hope that you will dress accordingly.

FORMAL PORTRAITS AND DIGITAL COPY

One of your keepsakes from the Neches River Festival will be a copy of the official program. This includes formal portraits of each Princess and Duchess and group photos of the Escorts. Every Princess and Duchess must provide one 5-inch x 7-inch color, glossy photograph and digital copy for inclusion in this program and the official NRF scrapbook. Please print your name lightly on the back of each photo in the lower right corner. Your photo is to be a “head and shoulder shot” only. Graduation pictures are acceptable only if NOT in a cap and gown. The most flattering pictures are taken in a simple black drape with minimal jewelry such as a strand of pearls and small earrings. No feather or brightly decorative drapes are to be used. Outdoor backdrops or those that are solid black or white do not transfer well in the program, so please advise your photographer. Contact the Neches River Festival office if you would like to see sample photos or programs from previous years. **Photos must be turned in to the Neches River Festival office or brought to the Princess Informational Meeting on January 21, 2024.**

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

There will be an official photographer and backdrop set up at the Ball to take family and group photographs. A pricing sheet with more details will be provided at the Princess Informational Meeting on **January 21, 2024** and mailed to the Duchesses.

EVENT ATTENDANCE

As part of the Neches River Festival Court, you are at the center of the city-wide celebration. These events have been planned with you in mind. Your attendance is expected as they have been prepared for you and your escort. Promptness and courtesy are expected at all times. You will receive a general calendar of events, plus individual invitations in the spring with all of the details needed to arrive and a contact person in case you cannot attend. These are joyous times with friends new and old. An event missed is a missed opportunity and a disrespect to those who are hosting you.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has changed the manner in which we communicate and promote events to those near and far. We love to see your photos and have the Neches River Festival “tagged” so that all can enjoy the celebrations. However, please be aware that there are many who will be judging you and the Neches River Festival based on the photos and comments they see posted on social media. It is best to avoid the following:

- Negative comments, posts, or messages about an event, location, host, or participant;
- Questionable or compromising photos of yourself or others;
- Offensive jokes or material;
- Overt bragging;
- Highly emotional or personal content

Remember, once you post something online, it is there forever. That being said, there will be many opportunities for photos and posts of you and all that make the Neches River Festival special. Social

media is one of our best ways to promote the Neches River Festival and encourage people to participate. Help us show others the NRF highlights.

HASHTAGS:

#NRF76

#SPRINGTIMEONTHENECHES

#NRFLXXVI

#RIVEROFNEWBEGINNINGS

The Neches River Festival has ZERO TOLERANCE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUGS. This applies to any and all events and any pre- or post-parties. Disrespectful behavior of yourself or towards others is not allowed. Inappropriate conduct by a participant (Princess, Duchess, Escort, Honor Guard) will result in immediate removal from that specific event and removal from the entire Festival, including eligibility to be selected as royalty, a recipient of a NRF scholarship, or any other honors.

All Neches River Festival activities will comply with applicable federal, state, and local guidelines related to COVID-19; however, a gathering of any number of persons is not without risk, and the Neches River Festival cannot guarantee your personal safety or health. All attendees voluntarily assume all risk related to participating in Neches Rivers Festival events and will be asked to complete a waiver acknowledging the same.

These are joyous times with friends old and new. We hope that the Neches River Festival is a highlight of your year and a memory to enjoy forever.

It is our honor and joy to have you participate in the 76th Neches River Festival!

Sincerely,

Julia Tucker Matheny
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