

## Get in Gear for Children's Art & Literacy Festival

### *Otis the tractor inspires new sculpture, putt puff puttedy fun book activities*

Tractors, trucks and ... bats? For three days in June, the 9th annual Children's Art & Literacy Festival will bring to life a variety of books by best-selling illustrator and author Loren Long. Downtown Abilene will be transformed into a storybook adventure with costumed characters, dramatic readings, hands-on activities and children's entertainment at 17 venues.

Abilene is the official Storybook Capital of America. This West Texas city is home to the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature, which will exhibit Mr. Long's original artwork. Abilene is also home to the largest collection of public storybook sculptures in America if not the world.

The festival kicks off to the public on Thursday night, June 11, 2020, with a Loren Long character costume contest followed by the Storybook Parade, the unveiling of the 26<sup>th</sup> storybook sculpture – Otis the tractor and his calf friend – and artist talk and book signing. Mr. Long has written and illustrated nine books in the Otis series. He has putt puff puttedy chuffed his way all over the bestseller lists with the Otis titles as well as a new edition of *The Little Engine Could*, the *Trucktown* series, *Mr. Peabody's Apples* by Madonna, *Nightsong* about Chiro the bat, and two baseball chapter book series.

Mr. Long will be in Abilene for the opening of his art exhibition and for the CALF festivities. Friday and Saturday, June 12-13, festival registrants can choose from a vast selection of enriching activities scattered throughout downtown. Children collect keepsake buttons for their festival lanyards as they complete each activity, which includes dramatic readings of Mr. Long's most popular books, art activities, marionettes, train rides, musical instrument petting zoo, and perennial childhood favorites like a magician and balloon sculptor. New this year is a "Touch A Truck" event where children can explore and touch a variety of vehicles of all sizes.

Last year's festival drew nearly 5,300 people from 91 Texas cities and 12 states.

Registration opens in February. Passes are \$8 for children ages 3 to 12 (2 and under are free) and \$13 for ages 13 and up. After May 15, passes cost \$11 for children and \$16 for adults.

CALF is sponsored by the Abilene Cultural Affairs Council, an affiliate of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce dedicated to promoting the arts and enriching lives in Abilene, a city of

119,000 people situated between Midland and Fort Worth. For more information and full schedule of events, visit [www.abilenecalf.com](http://www.abilenecalf.com) or call 325-677-1161. For information about other fun stuff to do and places to stay, visit [www.abilenevisitors.com](http://www.abilenevisitors.com), or call 800-727-7704.