

FEATURED

Song creates opportunity for local musician

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The Tallgrass Express String Band is Derrick Doty, Annie Wilson and Carl Reed.

•Courtesy photo



Annie Wilson, the Flint Hills Balladeer.



Tallgrass Express will open for Michael Martin Murphey in Council Grove on June 11.

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On this 200th anniversary of the Santa Fe Trail, a song telling its story has opened numerous doors for local songwriter Annie Wilson of rural Elmdale, named by Kansas in 2013 as the Flint Hills Balladeer.

In 2014, Wilson wrote and recorded **“Trail to Santa Fe”** describing the sixty-year saga of this epic American trail.

“I just love history and music. I had no idea this one song would create so many opportunities,” she said.

One such opportunity will be Friday, June 11 when Wilson’s band Tallgrass Express will be the opening act before Michael Martin Murphey’s concert in Council Grove, sponsored by Santa Fe Trail 200.

The next day on June 12, Wilson will perform the song at the Symphony in the Flint Hills after-concert “Story Circle,” highlighting the Santa Fe Trail theme for this year’s Symphony.

Early recognitions for the song began in 2015 when “Trail to Santa Fe” was selected as the “Official Song of the Santa Fe Trail Association,” a multi-state organization dedicated to preserving the fascinating saga of the trail. Since then, Wilson and Tallgrass Express have performed the song at numerous events, including at the Kaw Mission and Pioneer Bluffs.

Recently, “Trail to Santa Fe” became the soundtrack for two videos. In one video, Dave Kendall formerly of KTWU’s Sunflower Journeys uses historic images to visually illustrate the many stages of the trail’s story.

Another video by Symphony in the Flint Hills uses the song as background for dramatic aerial drone footage of extensive trail ruts still visible across the Kansas Flint Hills.

In addition, two new publications are printing the “Trail to Santa Fe” lyrics: Poetry of the Santa Fe Trail and the 2021 Symphony in the Flint Hills Journal. Lyrics to the song are also available at www.tallgrassexpress.com/TrailSantaFe.

Historian Steve Schmidt assisted Wilson in ensuring accuracy of song details: beginning in 1821 when the first oxen and mule teams traveled 900 miles — primarily over prairie and desert trails established by Indigenous people, on through the war with Mexico, and finally ending in 1880 when railroads replaced the trail.